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**ROBERT E. HOWARD**


**Talbot Mundy's**  
epic adventure

# **TROS of SAMOTHRACE**

**Volume 3**  
**THE PRAETOR'S DUNGEON**



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*The strength of another age, when  
the air was pure and tinged with  
wildness — this was the strength of*

## **TROS OF SAMOTHRACE!**

The disciplined son of a prince, chivalrous in a world where chivalry sprang perforce from the soul, not the barbarous fashion to the times, Tros could hardly bear to see a fish gaffed if a hook would serve, and he would never kill even a currish exploiter unless his own life were in danger. But he could be as ruthless as the sea, as practical as fate in matching means to ends. And his end was the destruction of the depraved woman-torturer Gaius Julius Caesar and his whole rotting Empire!

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**Talbot Mundy's**  
epic adventure  
**TROS of SAMOTHRAGE**

**Volume 3**  
**THE PRAETOR'S DUNGEON**



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## Chapter I

### NEWS!

*A good plan is as easy to get as a chestnut from the embers. For one bad one there are ten good. But find me a man who can splice a broken plan and of its two parts build a new one in the crack of a sail's splitting. I will make him free of my quarter-deck.*

From The Log of Tros of Samothrace

Before the next dawn following the afternoon when Tros dropped anchor off Pevensey, there were five small sailing boats made fast to the stern of the *Liafail*. Of the five, the first two had essayed to slip past by daylight, keeping to the shallow water on the far side of the channel. But one of the first things Tros had done was to take on a new deckload of flat stones, and to put Orwic to work at the catapult.

Within an hour the catapult crew had all the marks within reach so well ranged that they actually hit one flat stone with another on the edge of the sandy beach. So when two boats sailed by, ignoring signals, one had the mast knocked out of her and the second put her helm up promptly, coming alongside, scandalized, to plead such innocence as only fishermen are guilty of, and none but madmen could believe.

Neither boat carried anything that even looked suspicious, but their five-man crews denied that they knew who Cæsar was, denied that they had ever heard of him.

"Then stay here and be deaf a little longer!" was Tros's comment. He put two Northmen into each boat to guard the ends of the ropes with which he tied them to the taffrail.

By night it was not so simple, especially before the moon rose. Lapping of the waves against the ship

drowned other noises. It was so dark that from the poop Tros could scarcely see the mainmast. So he showed a light and lowered both boats, filling them with Northmen, who had orders to lie close in-shore on the far side and pounce on all who tried to pass. One by one they brought in three more crews of fishermen, not one gray-bearded innocent of whom had ever heard of Cæsar. Nor did they know how many more boats there were in Pevensey, nor who was Skell the Northman, nor Gwenhwyfar. They were quite sure they never had heard of Skell — so sure of it that Tros was quite sure they were lying.

“Nevertheless, I think I, too, would lie if I were in their case,” he reflected, and he lent no ear to Sigurdson’s suggestion of a rope’s end, nor to Conops’ talk about the virtues of a knife-point thrust between the toe nail and the quick. He fed those fishermen and waited.

And a little after dawn there came a sixth boat, rowed by two men with a third man in the stern. And that was followed by a seventh, under sail, that carried, by arrangement with Gwenhwyfar, her own red woolen shawl tied up to the masthead, streaming in the wind. So they let that sailing boat go by unchallenged and Tros, superstitious in his own way, laughed to himself to think it was the seventh.

“The sacred number — number of the gods!” he grinned, and waited for the rowboat.

From it stepped and climbed the hanging ladder to the poop, a man whose dull red beard stuck outward all around his face. He had a basket in his hand as big as those the women carried on their backs to Lunden market. He declared his name was Geraint but his beady eyes that peered over apple cheeks did not suggest that he expected Tros to believe that or anything else. He set the basket on the deck and stared at Tros and waited.

Tros poked at the basket with his toe a time or two, recalling in his mind the details of the system of communication he had settled on with Skell.

"How many eggs do you bring? When did you leave Gaul?" he asked.

"One egg," the man replied, who said his name was Geraint. "I left Gaul day before yesterday."

"One egg! Lord Zeus!"

Tros tore away the basket-lid and pulled another basket out, a third, and then a fourth inside that.

"Four warships? And sailed yesterday?"

The man grinned amiably, as if he admired the way Tros ground his jaws together.

"Too much time wasted! Too late!" Tros muttered, wrenching at the lid of the last basket. It was fastened all around with fiber and not easy to remove. Sigurdson, Orwic, Conops and Orwic's four retainers came and watched. Tros pushed the basket toward Conops.

"Use your knife," he ordered, and Conops slid the blade under the fastenings. Tros had turned away, hands behind him, staring at the open sea, his heavily ringed fingers clenching and unclenching as he ground his teeth.

How should he get men now? The Spaniards probably had landed yesterday in Britain and would be impossible to round up. True, he might catch Cæsar's warships on the way back, defeat them and take over the survivors of their crews, but —

A sharp exclamation from Conops made him turn again and stare. His eyes blazed suddenly. In Conops' hand, raised by the hair, was a human head.

"Skell's!" said Conops.

Sigurdson pounced on the man who had said his name was Geraint, seized his wrists and lashed them tight behind his back. The man offered no resistance.

"Torture!" said Conops, pointing with his right forefinger at the ghastly face. Orwic shuddered. Tros, his eyes changing, stared at the man whom Sigurdson had pinioned.

"You are not Geraint," he said.

"No," the man answered. "I am Symmachus. I am a Gaul."

Tros made a gesture of disgust.



"Put that thing back in all four baskets," he commanded. "Put a stone in with it. Sink it in mid-channel."

He turned on the man who now admitted that his name was Symmachus.

"You have your courage with you," he remarked.

The man smiled amiably.

"Cæsar said you are not a cruel man," he replied. "He said, if you should slay me you would do it swiftly. And he paid me well. He gave my two sons money and as much land as two teams of oxen can plow. We had nothing. I am well content."

"Are you a fisherman?" Tros asked.

The man nodded.

"I lost my boat. My wife died of the hunger."

The man's comically amiable face, framed in the dull-red whiskers, beamed with satisfaction. He had expected at least a scourging. His story was as frankly told as if he were relating something that was no concern of his at all.

"Geraint brought Skell," he said. "Geraint sold him to the Romans, but Skell slew Geraint when he saw he was betrayed. I saw that. The Romans took me for a witness. I saw Skell brought before Cæsar. I was within six paces of him, squatting on the ground before the great tent. Cæsar said to Skell, 'I know you!' But Skell said nothing.

"For a long while Skell was silent, although Cæsar asked him many questions. I saw Skell put his hand to his mouth, but the Roman officer who stood beside him saw that too, and smote him in the jaw and, seizing him, gagged him with a sword-hilt, breaking some teeth. He pulled out a piece of parchment from his mouth and offered it to Cæsar, who smiled.

" 'You are a spy,' said Cæsar. 'You stand convicted.' But Skell said nothing.

" 'Torture him,' said Cæsar, 'and when he is willing to tell his story, let me know. There is no need to preserve his usefulness,' he added. 'You may put him to extremity. When we have his story we are done with him.'



“So they threw Skell to the ground not far from Cæsar’s tent, and a black man came up who had a pot of charcoal. Hot irons were put to Skell’s feet until he yelled so that Cæsar frowned and grew impatient, ordering that Skell be gagged, saying it was impossible to attend to important matters in the midst of so much noise. And after a long time an officer came to Cæsar, who said that Skell would now speak.

“So they carried Skell, he begging to be slain, and Cæsar, observing him shrewdly, said he would confer that favor provided the truth were told, and all the truth, without prevarication. So Skell told about the eggs he was to send you in a basket to signify when and from which port the Spanish troops were sailing. And he told about this great ship, speaking very swiftly because he wished to die soon and be free from pain. But Cæsar made him tell the story three times over. And the secretary wrote it.

“Then Cæsar, studying the tablet, made a gesture with his head and with his left thumb. So they dragged Skell away to the camp ditch at the place where the rubbish is burned, and presently they came back carrying his head.

“There was much joking after that, and laughter, Cæsar wondering whom he should send to you with that head in a basket in place of the eggs from a Spanish hen. And one said — he was a high officer. He wore a white cloak — ‘it will not do now to send the Spaniards.’ But it happened at that moment Cæsar’s eyes observed me where I still squatted in the dust outside the tent.

“ ‘No,’ he said, ‘it will not do now to send the Spaniards. Who is that man?’

“So they told him, and I was made to stand before him in the opening of the tent, he striking his teeth with the thumbnail of his right hand. Suddenly he asked me —

“ ‘Do you speak the Roman tongue or understand it?’

“But I pretended not to understand the question,

being frightened. I began to beg of him in Gaulish, saying I am poor and have two sons but no more any fishing boat, having lost mine in the storm when I went to catch good fish for Cæsar.

“So he smiled, and when he had thought awhile he began to bargain with me, until at last I agreed to carry Skell’s head to you in a basket and to take all chances that you might slay me.

“ ‘But I think he will not,’ said Cæsar, ‘because Tros is afraid for his own soul and will not take human life if he can help it.’

“Then, having agreed how much money and how much land he will give my sons, he tried to catch me, asking suddenly, ‘Concerning the Spaniards, what will you say when Tros asks you?’ But though his words were Gaulish I pretended not to understand his meaning, being fearful he might call the bargain off if I should seem to know too much. I was anxious that my sons should have that money and the land.

“ ‘Did you not hear what Skell told me?’ he demanded.

“So I admitted I had heard that. Skell had told his tale in Gaulish. Cæsar said —

“ ‘What then will you say to Tros about the Spaniards?’

“And I said —

“ ‘I know nothing of them.’

“He thought a long while, chin on hand, and at last he said:

“ ‘If I had ships to spare, I would send those Spaniards and not you. But since I can not spare ships, I will have my little joke with Tros. It makes no difference what you say about the Spaniards. Say anything you please, since they will not sail. If Tros is still alive when you reach Britain, wait for him in Pevensey and give that head to him, pretending that you bring Skell’s message.’ ”

Tros turned his back to hide a grin. He would avenge Skell! The poor knave had done his best to play the man at last. He did not blame him for

confessing under torture.

"Shall we put back to the Thames?" asked Orwic.  
"No use going any farther now."

"Put that man Symmachus in the Northmen's mess," Tros answered. "He has done us a good service. Orwic, bring me Rhys's men from the forepeak."

Orwic hesitated. He knew his Britons.

"If you let them ashore in Pevensey," he said, "they will find Gwenhwyfar, and the next you know, she and they will be cooking up a mischief for you. You will have to use British harbors until you get more men and —"

"I will get more men!" Tros answered grimly.  
"Spaniards."

"But we have just heard they are not to leave Gaul."

"Credulous horseman! Do you think Cæsar would have said they will not sail unless they will? If he had said they will sail, I might have doubted it! Bring me those fellows of Rhys's."

So presently, all blinking at the sunlight, weak-kneed from confinement, filthy from much vomiting in the darkness, Rhys's men were lined up on the deck below the poop, and Tros addressed them arrogantly, standing with his legs apart, a hand on either hip.

"I held you hostages for your master's good behavior. Since sailing, two attempts were made to wreck my ship, and for both of them the Lord Rhys was responsible. Your lives are forfeit!"

They demurred, very weak and bewildered. They said they knew nothing of Tros's terms with the Lord Rhys, and nothing of his efforts to destroy the ship. They had been locked up in a dark place where food was thrown to them, and they had all been at death's door most of the time, so that they supposed the food was poisoned.

"As hostages, your lives are forfeited to me," Tros repeated. "But I will give you one chance for your lives. Can you fight? Are you willing to man my arrow-engines against Cæsar's fleet if I give you your liberty afterward?"

They complained they were unfit to fight. They had no special quarrel against Cæsar. They were the Lord Rhys's men and needed his permission before they might offer their services elsewhere. Their bellies were all watery with sickness.

"To the oars then!" Tros commanded. "Ye shall work as slaves if ye will not fight freely! Shame on you! Your master played a treachery on me and on the Lord Caswallon. He has tried to sell his native land to Cæsar. Have ye no honesty, that ye refuse the opportunity to wipe that shame away? Such dogs as you deserve the lower oar bank!"

They replied that they were honest men, trained to use weapons not oars.

"Honest?" Tros looked them over one by one. "Orwic, take charge of them. See that they clean themselves on deck where the air can blow the stink away. Feed them. Then give them their choice between the arrow-engines or the lower oar bank. If they choose oars, chain them to the benches! Sigurdson, man the capstan! Haul short! Conops, take those five boats that lie astern of us, set their crews ashore and break a plank from each boat's bottom. We don't want any spy work done for Cæsar for a few days! Lars, Harald, Haarfager, masthead men aloft! Oar crews to the benches. Out oars! Ready for slow ahead to come up on the anchor! Cymbals and drums, stand by!"

Of all the certainties on earth Tros knew the surest was that Cæsar would be swift. If, as seemed proven, he was planning to throw Britain into discord by sending foreign troops to help one rival king against another, he would send them now, not wait for events to rearrange themselves. Already he had had three days to man his ships since Skell revealed to him the discovery of Gwenwynwyn's and Rhys's plot against Caswallon. He would not be likely to give Caswallon time to oppose the Spaniards' landing.

The arrow-riddled cloak and the letter describing the wreck in the Thames would be in Gaul before



night, for the wind was fair and if the sailboat men knew anything about the tide they could lay a V-shaped course that would bring them to Caritia at sunset. That news should be enough to make Cæsar act in any case, supposing that the Spaniards were not already on the sea.

As he worked the ship seaward under oars, with Conops crying soundings from the chains, his brain was busy with those Spaniards, for he knew what difficulties the Romans had in that forever turbulent and plundered province. He conjectured the five hundred would be levies who had not exactly mutinied at being brought to Gaul, but who were neither loyal nor safe to be brigaded alongside other troops. All Roman troops, including the Italians themselves, were likelier than not to mutiny if given much encouragement, and it was an old game for a Roman general to transfer disaffected portions of his army to some outlying district where their behavior toward the inhabitants might lead to trouble and thus provide an excuse for an expedition, loot and easy laurels for the general himself.

"If Cæsar thinks me dead, then I will soon have a ship full of good spirited men," Tros told himself. "If those Spaniards are such firebrands that Cæsar is glad to risk them on any venture, then they're just the lads for me! Better spend time taming good men than waste it coaxing dullards. They'll quarrel with my Britons. Yes, and it'll do the Britons good."

He began to pace the poop, his eyes sweeping the horizon, then came to a stand again where all could see him.

"Done with the oars!" he roared. "Make sail! Taut on the port preventer stays! Deckhands to the sheets! Aloft there. Shake her down!"

He watched the big sails sheeted home, felt the ship heel to the wind with a white wake boiling from under her, and laughed.

"Gods, give me but the opportunity!" he prayed. "I'll use it!"

## Chapter II

### THE FIGHT OFF DERTEMUE

*How few there are who know that victories are not won on the field but in a man's heart.*

From the Log of Tros of Samothrace

Tros made for Dertemue with all the speed his ship could show, experimenting with the sails, putting the oars to work whenever the wind dropped to less than a strong breeze, making his men sleep by their stations, watching his three water clocks, calculating, fretting and yet letting no man see that he was worried.

He kept well away from the coast of Gaul and anchored for the night under the Isle of Vectis, partly because he feared the tide-race in the dark but also because he suspected some of Cæsar's light ships might be lurking thereabouts, and to have fought them would have taken time, with the added risk that they might escape and carry the news to Cæsar that the *Liafail* was not wrecked after all.

Nearly all next day he had to use the oars, for wind failed, but when night fell, he carried on with all sail set, considering the coastwise lights that burned not far above the level of the beach. Sigurdson begged him to anchor.

"Wreckers!" he said. "All Britons ply that trade. They set those lights to tempt raiders on to the reefs, and now and then they catch a merchant-ship."

But Tros believed he saw a system in the lights. They were too bright, spaced at too regular intervals, and did not look innocent enough to be wreckers' decoys. They were signals. He had often seen what care the Roman navigators took, when about to cross uncharted water with a fleet of ships, to send men in

advance in the liburnians to build great bonfires, near the headlands as much as possible, but in any case in a long line to guide them to their destination if the fleet should become scattered in the night. They would follow the long string of lights until there were no more of them, and know by that that they had reached their port, when they would wait until dawn should show them the harbor entrance.

He did not know how far it was to Dertemue, but he knew the length of the southern coast of Britain more or less, and he was beginning to learn to judge the ship's speed, though it was so much greater under sail than he had ever dared hope it might be that he hardly trusted to his calculations yet. Even without her topsails she would boil along with a following or a beam wind, the clean tincoated hull reducing friction to a minimum. And she would sail faster and closer into the wind than any ship he had ever known. However, they had toiled a whole day under oars, the half of the time against the tide, so he kept well out to seaward of the longshore lights, and doubted when he reached the last one, doubted that it really could be Dertemue.

He took a sounding, but the water was too deep, and he laughed at Sigurdsen's suggestion that they should use the oars and work in-shore in search of anchorage. Orwic agreed with Sigurdsen.

"If that is Dertemue, we should be ready to enter the river-mouth at dawn, and so catch Cæsar's Spaniards as they enter!"

"They never shall enter!" said Tros. "My genius is best at sea. Cæsar's on land. I wait here."

So he shortened sail and hove to; but he did not wait long before the masthead lookout cried that he heard cordage creaking in the dark. Great banks of clouds obscured the moon and there was wind enough to fill the rigging with the sea-wail that deadens hearing. How a Northman could hear cordage creaking through all that sound Tros found it hard to understand; he leaned far over the taffrail, straining eyes and ears.

The Northman warned again, and the man at the helm said something about ghosts in awe-struck undertones. But at last Tros's eyes detected blackness blacker than the night, considerably lower on the water than his own great ship, not more than half a cable's length away. There were no lights, nothing but that spot of utter darkness and a mere suggestion of a sound that did not exactly harmonize with the orchestra of sea and wind.

Rhys's men who had made their choice without much hesitation when the wind had blown the sickness out of them were sleeping by the midship arrow-engines, ready for Orwic to captain them when an engagement should begin. The catapults were useless in the dark, but every Northman had a bow within reach in addition to his ax and dagger. Twelve of the big stinkballs had been set on deck in Conops' charge, the oil-primed fuses ready to insert, a firepot and a torch stowed under cover near-by. Below, the drowsy rowers rested on oars indrawn until the blades lay on the ports all ready to be thrust out at a signal.

Tros looked sharply at the shore, and then at the spot of darkness. It was moving very slowly seaward, not toward the coast. It was therefore not a Roman ship. The moon was behind Tros's back as he leaned over the taffrail; clouds obscured it, but the sky was a shade less dark there than in any other direction. Therefore, obviously, since Tros could see the approaching ship, however dimly, whoever was aboard her must have seen the *Liafail*. Yet the ship came on.

"They believe I'm a Roman," Tros muttered.

He turned to the Northman beside him and ordered —

"Stations! Silence!"

The Northman vanished on the run, with Orwic at his heels and there was presently a stir below deck where the sleepy oarsmen were awakened, followed by the clanking of the arrow-engine cranks. Somewhere forward, Conops rolled a stinkball closer to the bulwark.

Hove to, the *Liafail* was drifting gradually seaward,



away from the approaching ship, almost bow-on to the stranger, whose captain, likely enough, if he could see three masts, might think there were three ships in the darkness. Suddenly Tros cried aloud in the Roman tongue.

"Ho there! Is yonder port Dertemue?"

The answer came in Celtic —

"Are you Septimus Flaccus with the Spaniards?"

"I am admiral of Cæsar's fleet!" Tros answered. "Come along."

Some one on the approaching ship could understand the Roman speech. She changed her course that instant, looking almost ridiculously undersized and awkward as she came near enough for Tros to see her outline. He touched the helm, not taking it, but guiding the Northman's hand.

"Stand by to grapple!" he roared suddenly. "Out fenders!"

He thought of his new paint even in that crisis, and swore suddenly between his teeth, for as usual, Orwic let go a flight of arrows without waiting for the word. There was tumult aboard the other ship. They put the helm hard over trying to go about, their shrouds missing the great serpent's tongue by inches. It was clumsily done, but it saved them from a second of Orwic's volleys.

"Cease arrow-fire!" Tros roared, his hand on the helm again. A second later there was a crash as the bower-anchor and a great eight-pronged grappling hook beside went down on to the small ship's deck, splintering the timbers.

"Who are you?" Tros shouted. For as much as sixty breaths there was no answer. Sigurdson came running aft to report that the grapnel held and that six Northmen were on the small ship's deck to make sure none should cut it loose. Tros bade him take the helm and keep the ship hove to.

"Who are you?" he roared again.

An indignant voice answered him:

"I am Britomaris and a pilot with me. Is it so you treat your friends?"

Tros laughed.

"Come aboard, Britomaris! Come before I sink you."

He threw a rope ladder overside and Britomaris climbed it, standing before Tros, startled and indignant.

"Tros?" he said, bending his head to peer into the darkness.

Tros looked like a big black shadow on the poop.

"You thought me sunk in River Thames, now didn't you!" Tros answered, chuckling. "Ho, there! Bring a lantern, some one."

By the light of it he studied Britomaris, wondering that a man so good to see, who stood so upright in his furs and handled a spear so stately, should be such a moral weakling as he knew this man to be.

"You are caught in the act, Britomaris," he said. "Do you know of any reason why I should not take you to Caswallon?"

"Do you dare to fight me, Tros?" Britomaris answered. It was his only possible way out. He did not look as if he liked the prospect. Tros laughed.

"You are a prisoner. I don't fight prisoners. Give me that spear. Now the sword. Now the dagger. So." He threw the weapons on the deck, where a Northman gathered and examined them. "Do you know of any reason why I should not denounce you to Caswallon?"

Britomaris tugged at his moustache, attempting to look dignified, but plainly worried. The Northman who held the lantern grinned.

"No answer? Well, I will tell you a reason. I promised your wife Gwenhwyfar. I have told her I will save you from this infamy."

"Told *her*?" Britomaris stared at him.

"Aye. She and I turned friends at last. When do you expect the Romans?"

"Now. I thought you were —"

"Landlubber!" Tros interrupted. "When saw you a Roman ship like this one? Blind mole! How many ships will the Romans bring?"

"Two, full of Spaniards. Four biremes to protect them."

"Who said so?"

"Caius Rufus, the Roman."

"When did he come?"

"Since nightfall, post haste in a liburnian to bid us light the beacons and to have a pilot ready. He said Cæsar had moved with his wonted suddenness since learning that Tros is dead."

"Zeus! But that fellow is swift!" Tros said admiringly. "Gwenhwyfar's message saying I am dead, with my cloak and a letter to prove it, can hardly have reached Gaul before sunset night before last, and now — aloft there! Use ears and eyes! The wind's against them. The Romans will come rowing!"

"They will come with lights," said Britomaris.

The man had no resistance in him. He was as plastic in Tros's hands as if the two had been master and man for a generation.

"Caius Rufus said they will burn a lantern at each end of the spar of each ship. Will you battle with them, Tros?"

"You too!" Tros answered. "You shall boast to Gwenhwyfar that you played the man this once! Forward with you! Into the deckhouse and take Orwic's orders!"

"Orwic?" said Britomaris, and his jaw dropped.

"Aye! Caswallon's nephew, Orwic! Fall away!"

So Britomaris let a Northman lead him to the deckhouse, and Tros sent Conops overside to clear away the grapnel. But he took no chances; the smaller ship still might warn the Romans.

"Cut away their rigging! Send their sail up here!"

The Northmen's axes answered. They even chopped the mast away.

"Out oars now, and off home!"

It was an hour before the labored thumping of the

oars died away in the direction of the shore. Another hour before a Northman at the masthead shouted that he saw lights to the southward. Tros himself went to the masthead then. He counted twelve lights, several miles away, scattered in pairs over a considerable breadth of sea. And he studied them for a long time, trying to determine which might be the ships containing Spaniards and which the escort.

The Romans were poor hands at keeping station on the open sea. Likelier than not the ships were all mixed up together, their commanders satisfied to keep within sight of one another, not anticipating an engagement and confident that they would receive ample warning of the presence of an enemy.

No lights showed on the *Liafail*, but her bulk and her three great spars would show plainly as soon as dawn should begin to steal along the sky. It lacked an hour of dawn yet and the wind had dropped. Glancing shoreward he could hardly see the beacons. It seemed to him that their crimson flare was being veiled and was spreading on the veil the while it grew dim.

"Fog!" he muttered. He had asked the gods for opportunity!

He returned to the poop and sent for Conops, Sigurdson and Orwic.

"We will let that fog drift down on us," he said. "If it comes not fast enough we will row toward it. When the Romans can no longer see one another's lights they will start their war trumpets a-blaring. They will low like full cows at milking time. We will pick them off one by one. Their system is to crowd an enemy between the beaks of two or four ships, or to lay alongside and drop their dolphins into her, and to let fall a gangplank with a spike in it. That pins both ships together and along the plank their boarders come with locked shields.

"Now they can not use that gangplank, because our deck is higher than theirs. But they can break our oars, and they can use the iron dolphin, since it



hangs above the yardarm. Above all, we must avoid their beaks.

"Orwic, their commanders will not stand at the stern, as I will. They will fight their ships from the top of the midship citadel where the sail, which they will keep spread whether there is wind or not, masks them from an enemy, and whence they can shout to the helmsman as well as direct the javelin- and arrow-fire. So aim first at the citadels and keep those swept with a cross fire from the arrow-engines.

"Sigurdsen, take you the helm. See to it that the sails are well clewed up but ready to be sheeted down with all speed if a wind should come and blow the fog away. This fog, which the gods have sent, is better than forty men to us."

But Sigurdsen was a pessimist.

"It will make the Romans close their ranks, and we will have to fight six ships at once," he grumbled.

"It sets all Northmen free for the fighting, since neither side can use sails!" Tros retorted.

"Aye, and we under-oared, with a half-trained crew! There are nineteen men so weak from vomiting they can't pull their weight, and if the ship rolls —"

"Clew up the sails!" Tros snapped at him. "Then come aft and take the helm."

The giant went forward, grumbling to himself, but Tros had come to understand the pessimism of the man; he liked to set all gloom in a dense formation and then waded into it like a disk into the skittles.

"Conops," he said, "the catapults are useless until fog and darkness lift. You and Glendwyr pick the four best Britons and stand by to serve stinkballs by hand. Let the Britons light the fuses. You and Glendwyr each toss one ball at a time into an enemy's hold, if they come close enough. But no waste, mind! That stuff costs money. Not more than two balls at a time into one ship."

For a long while after that they lay in silence, rolling leisurely, watching the advancing lights grow pale against the brightening cloud bank to the southward.

The big ship drifted very slowly on the changing tide toward the fog that crept toward them from the shore. The first out-reaching wisps of it surrounded them as dawn touched the southerly clouds with gold and turned the edges of the mist to silver. Now they could see four of the Roman ships distinctly. The masthead man reported two more following. Tros bit his nails. The mist was still only in wisps around him. He feared the sun gleaming on the golden serpent might betray his presence too soon.

The four ships in the lead, less than half a mile apart, were armed biremes. According to the masthead man's report, the two-ship convoy trailed a long way in the rear. He must get between the warships and the convoy and engage the biremes one by one, avoiding all collision and yet steering close enough for Conops to lob stinkballs into them. Conops and Glendwyr could hardly toss the leaden balls much farther than an oar-length. If he should smash the oars by coming too close, he had plenty of spares ready; but he knew what a panic there would be below decks when the broken oar ends knocked the rowers off the benches. He must avoid that even at the cost of letting more than half the enemy escape him.

A breadth of warm air brought the fog rolling down in clouds at last, and presently Tros heard the war horns blaring on the Roman ships. The fog moved fast; if it should be one of those narrow, long-shore streaks that hug the coast of Britain most days of the year, it might vanish too soon.

"Starboard a little, starboard!" he directed, leaning overside to listen for the horn blare. "Hold her so."

Then he took his stand where the drum and cymbal men below the poop could see the wand he held in his right hand. But he made no signal to them until the blare of the nearest horn came from astern and a Roman, aware of something looming, hailed him through the fog.

Then action, swift and resolute! He signaled to the

cymbals and a crash of brass shook all the oarsmen into life. The water boiled alongside and the ship swung with a lurch as Sigurdson leaned all his weight against the steering oar, his left foot on the rail and his muscles cracking.

"Stand by all! Ready on the starboard bow there, Conops! Fire when you see them, Orwic!"

He had one bireme by the stern, at any rate. No danger from the dolphin, almost none to the oars if Sigurdson kept his head. He signaled the cymbals, quickening the oar beat. The men at the masthead yelled incomprehensibly. There was a terror-stricken, flatted chorus from the Roman trumpets and the bireme loomed up like a ghost.

"Zeus!"

Sigurdson threw his weight against the helm, or a bank of oars would have gone to splinters. The air twanged as if the devils of the underworld were plucking-death's harps, whistled as if death were on the wing — four midship arrow-engines — and then Orwic's voice:

"Reload! Lud's blood, what are you waiting for?"

Yells from the bireme, two thuds as the leaden balls struck woodwork, Conops crying, "Two hits!" and the ghost was gone. Fog, but a glare in the fog and the shouts of men who struggled to extinguish flame but choked in the stench and were forced back by the prodigious heat! Fog, and the blare of horns ahead. Shouts and a thrashing of water where another bireme came about to find out what the matter might be.

"Stop oars!"

The drums and cymbals crashed in sudden unison that checked the oars in mid-swing. Tros let the great ship carry way and for a minute listened to the Roman oar-beats, knowing that his silence would confuse the Romans and that his own man at the masthead, being higher, would see sooner than the Romans could. Astern now, there was a crimson splurge like sunset in the fog, where a bireme burned.

"Right on us! Straight ahead!" The masthead man lapsed into Norse again.

"Beak! Their beak's right into us!" yelled Conops from the bow.

But the Roman helmsman saw the serpent's tongue in air above the bireme's bow and changed course in a panic. The ships struck shoulder on and, in the crash that threw the oarsmen off the benches, none heard the leaden balls thud down the bireme's forward hatch and roll among the rowers. Conops' voice cried:

"Two hits! Back away, master! Back away!"

The arrow-engines twanged, and the Romans came back with a hail of javelins. There was a great splash, for they let the dolphin go and it missed by the width of the roll of both ships as they reeled back from the impact.

Javelins again — *twang, twang*, and shriek of the twelve-arrow flights; a din below decks as the rowers of both ships rioted. The Romans had the better discipline, but there was stenching fire in their hold, whereas Tros's men were only bewildered. Crash of Tros's drums and cymbals signaling for backed oars; the choking, acrid reek of greenish-yellow smoke, emerging from the bireme's hatch; response from the oars at last. As the Northmen plied their bows from anywhere on deck and Orwic's arrow-engines, cranking, twanging, screaming, swept the bireme's citadel, the reflection of a crimson glare lit on the serpent's golden tongue. Its agate eyes shone. It appeared to laugh as, curtseying to the swell and the staccato jerk of backed oars, it retired into the fog.

Tros laughed. Two biremes reckoned with! Two crimson splurges in the fog, and only two more ships to find and fight before those Spaniards were his!

But suddenly he swore. The fog was lifting! He could see the shore already and the burning biremes were in such full view that the crew of the nearest began manning the ballista that was farthest from



the flame. An arrow two yards long feathered with burning pitch hummed overhead, and a second fell short as the backed oars took him out of range.

There were wounded Northmen on the deck, but he had no time to spare for them. In another minute now the hurrying mist would vanish and reveal him to the other biremes and to the ships that carried Spaniards. He ordered —

“Stop!”

And quicker than the echo of the drums and cymbals he was off the poop and down the after-hatch, where he stood and roared to the rowers, taking care that laughter, triumph should beam from his face:

“Good men!” There were half a dozen of them stunned between the benches. “Two big ships beaten by your steadfastness! When I call for speed, let oars bend! Ye have done well. Now do better!”

In an instant he was on the poop again, his eyes searching the fog’s afterguard that still concealed him from four Roman ships:

“Orwic!” he roared, and Orwic’s boyish face appeared in the deckhouse door. “Man the bow catapults! Leave Glendwyr to the arrow-engines. Conops! Stand by Orwic!”

Presently, to the sound of grinding, great weights rose between the uprights and the magazine crews rolled the leaden balls into the racks provided. Conops began fitting fuses, soaking them with sulphur and oil of turpentine. Tros ordered Sigurdson to shake down the great mainsail. He could spare no men for more than that, just yet. And as the big sail bellied in the wind the last fog streamers scattered southward, showing all four ships, and him to them.

The apparition of Tros’s great vermilion-sided *Liafail*, with three masts and her long-tongued serpent flashing in the sun, struck terror in the Romans. They knew nothing of how dangerously he was undermanned. Two biremes, widely separated from each other and at least two miles away from their crowded convoys, ’bouted helm and ran for it, clapping on all

sail to help the oars and striving to get between Tros and the Spaniards.

"Full speed!"

A race began in which Tros was badly handicapped. If he had clapped on more sail, he would have had no men to spare to serve the catapults.

Along two legs of a skalene triangle, its apex the slow convoys, Tros and the biremes raced, Tros with the shorter course, but they with full crews, going nearly two to his one. Around them and about them splashed the stinkballs, as the great weights thumped into the hold, outranging the Roman ballistas easily, but making no hits. Tros ground his teeth at the waste of precious ammunition.

He ordered, "cease fire," ordered the great forward lateen sail sheeted down, thinning out the catapult crews to the point where they were hardly enough to crank the weights, ordered the oar stroke quickened until there was so much splashing that he had to slow it down again. And in spite of all, the biremes gained on him hand over hand, until at last, while the leader raced on to tranship the Spaniards from the slower craft and carry them back to Gaul, the other turned and offered fight.

It was the act of a bold captain. No solitary bireme had the slightest chance against that great ship boiling down on him. The terrific speed had tried the Roman's rowers, who had hardly strength enough by now to give force to the iron-shod ram. Tros changed the helm and kept away from him to westward.

"Fire both catapults!"

One missed. The other, laid by Orwic, hurled its lead ball straight against the bireme's citadel, smashing through the woodwork and exploding. Then the Roman captain changed his mind. His ship on fire, he turned in a wide circle and began to race again toward the convoys.

"Try again, Orwic!"

Two more balls whirled on their way, and again one missed, but the second — Conops aimed it —

smashed through the bireme's deck and, though it did not burst, the cloud of suffocating smoke increased. The oars collapsed, like the legs of a dying centipede, as the whole crew, marvelously disciplined, went to work to extinguish fire.

"They are mine!" laughed Tros, his eyes fixed on the convoys.

But that other, swifter bireme lay already beam to beam with the nearest of the transports. They had lowered their spiked gangplank and a stream of armed men poured along it to the roof of the bireme's citadel. Before Tros could prevent, both forward catapults went off with a crash and shudder. Two of the leaden stinkballs hit their mark, one into either ship. Orwic, Conops and the whole deck crew went frantic with delight as both exploded. There was an instant blaze too great for Tros's explosive to have caused; one ball had burst into the Roman magazine, where they had stored their own pitch and sulphur, and both ships with their crowd of panic-stricken men, were swallowed in a reeking cloud of smoke, shot through with flame.

Tros changed the course to pursue the second convoy. Then he went up forward and took Orwic by the throat.

"Hot-headed horseman!" he swore, forcing him backward against the catapult. "Those last two shots have cost me ten-score men!"

He shook him, but he could not take the laugh off Orwic's face.

"Look! Lud's teeth, but look!" he exclaimed, and, breaking away from Tros's grip, watched the two locked ships, one mass of flame, sinking.

Tros took no pleasure in the sight. His eye was on one bireme to the northward that had managed to subdue the fire in her hold and was picking up survivors from another bireme nearer shore. The third, a mile this side of them, was losing its fight with the flames.

"Get aft, Orwic!" Then he ordered both the cata-

pults uncranked, and told off men to care for the nine wounded — arrow and javelin wounds, not good to look at and not easy to treat. A Northman screamed and bit the deck beside him as they pulled out a barbed arrow-head and poured hot tar into the wound.

“Conops!” Tros commanded. “Take one stinkball and stand in the bow. When I lay alongside those Spaniards have the fuse ready, but don’t light it until I give the word. If I do, then drop it into their hold to scare them out.”

Again he went down through the hatch to encourage the rowers. Sigurdson sent a messenger to say they were almost within arrow range of the ship they were pursuing. Then he went up slowly and stood staring over the stern. The capture of the last ship was a foregone certainty. It hardly interested him. It hardly troubled him to see the Romans burn and drown, for they were trouble hunters with the game reversed on them. But it grieved him to the deep, strong marrow of his being to have lost two hundred and fifty Spaniards.

“Good, spirited, unruly rebels to a man!” he muttered. “I could have given them their chance. The gods gave me mine, and I let Orwic rob me!”

Sigurdson nudged him.

“Carry on!” Tros ordered. Then, when they were beam to beam with the slow, helpless ship he ordered the oars in through the ports and roared to the ship’s captain to come about and heave to, setting the example. The man — he was a long-haired Gaul — obeyed. More than two hundred blue-eyed Spaniards armed with swords, spears, shields and javelins, crowded the deck.

“Where is your captain?” Tros asked in the Roman tongue. The Gaul laughed drily.

“They threw him overboard. He did not please them.”

“How so?”

“They are hungry. There was no food.”

“Sigurdson! Lower away the boats!”



When both the boats were in the water Tros gave orders to the Spaniards to throw their weapons into them. A few splashed overside, but presently the boats came back with swords, spears, javelins, shields and helmets, loaded to the gunwale. Then he ordered a hundred Spaniards brought from ship to ship, which was as many as he dared to have at one time, until he had subdued them properly. Next, he put a small crew of Northmen aboard the Gaulish ship and passed a towrope.

"There is one Roman bireme still afloat," said Orwic, pointing. "She runs home."

"Let her! We will have our hands full with these Spaniards. Let the Romans go and tell their tale to Cæsar!"

A great Spaniard swaggered up to him.

"Who are you?" he demanded, not exactly insolently. He was curious and, beyond the ordinary run of mortals, proud.

"I am admiral of Cæsar's fleet!" said Tros. "By right of my appointment I transfer you to my ship. Get forward!"

The Spaniard went to sit and whisper with his friends and watch and wonder.

### Chapter III

MEN — MEN — MEN!

*In my day I have known eighteen kings, but not one who had enough wisdom to laugh at himself. Caswallon the king came nearest to it. But even he believed his enemies were something other than the goads employed by Destiny to rouse his energy. As a master is, so are his men. I know a people if I know its rulers.*

From the Log of Tros of Samothrace

It was a long pull back to Vectis, with a favoring wind but one third of the time and a heavy, sow-bellied Gaulish freighter in tow. One hundred Spaniards were put to the oars, but they refused work although they understood oars, were not seasick and, in a blue-eyed opportunist fashion of their own, were not unreasonable.

Tros sent for the man who had first accosted him when captured.

"Who — what are you?" he demanded. The man's muscles stood out like molded ivory. He smiled with a kind of traditional dignity, as if life were something that his ancestors had borne and he supposed, he, too, could tolerate it.

"I am Jaun Aksue of Escual-Herria,"\* he said in Gaulish. "There was fighting in my country, between us and the Romans. Their proconsul set a trap and caught a thousand of us, of whom he slew one half. The rest of us he sent to Cæsar to help fight Gauls. Cæsar armed and drilled us but we stole his weapons and helped the Gauls in various ways. So Cæsar decided to send us to Britain. How are you an admiral of Cæsar's fleet and yet attack the Romans?"

"Were you not a Roman soldier and yet helped Gauls?" Tros answered.

"True. I would have helped the Britons perhaps, or perhaps not. Who knows? We Eskualdenak† are not such fools as Cæsar thinks."

"Then you and I are of one mind," said Tros. "It is because I am not such a fool as Cæsar thinks that you are my prisoner."

"We Eskualdenak are not good prisoners. We are worse slaves," the man answered. "You have enough slaves on this ship without increasing trouble for yourself. What do you propose to do with us, O Admiral?"

Tros, stroking his chin, studied the man.

\* The country of the Basques.

† Basques.

“Are you these men’s leader?”

“In a sense, yes. They elected me to lead them. In our land all are noblemen. But Cæsar’s officer degraded me for what he said was insolence. We threw him overboard,” he added casually.

Tros did not propose to cut in halves another opportunity by having to use force where argument would better serve. But he needed the right argument.

“Will you go home?” he asked suddenly.

“Not we! The Roman proconsul, Livius, would crucify us, unless we should take to the mountains. We are a sea-faring folk. We hunt whales. But Livius burned our ships.”

“Will you settle in Britain?”

“Who knows? You have a marvel of a ship. We might sail with you, if you should make it worth while.”

“Make it worth my while!” Tros answered. “Of what value is your word?”

The man looked straight into Tros’s eyes.

“To you? Why, just the value that you set on it. I never supposed it could have a market price. No more did Livius, the Roman, or he would have taxed it a tenth. How should a man sell his word?”

Tros grinned. He liked him.

“Jaun,” he said — and Jaun meant nobleman, a title that all men of that race prefixed to their names; but Tros did not know that, and the word was easy to remember — “I am the master of this ship. I am obeyed. And I am minded that you Eskualdenak will make a good crew. But I must have your word on it.”

“Whither will you sail?” the man asked.

“Whither I will.”

“How much will you pay us?”

“As much as I see fit, and for the present, nothing except food and clothing. My men prosper as I prosper, sweat and starve, too, as I sweat and starve, save that I take the master’s end of it and sweat the hardest.”

“Are you an equal among equals?”

“By Zeus, no! I am master of this ship!”

"I like you," said Jaun Aksue. He spoke with dignity, as if he had conferred a boon that were his to refuse, were he minded. "I will speak about this to my friends. If we agree to serve you, we will serve. You will not sell us to the Romans?"

"I will sooner die," Tros answered. "But mark this, and remember it: I will also rather die than not be master of my ship. It is I who confer favors, and the price is full obedience."

"I will speak to them of that." Jaun Aksue went down into the hold.

It was an hour before he returned on deck and then, with Tros's permission, went swarming along the towrope, taking his ducking in the bight and climbing on to the Gaulish vessel with a nimbleness that forced unwilling praise from Conops, for Conops disliked to believe that there were seamen half as handy as himself. At the end of another hour he returned in the same way, swung himself up over the poop and stood dripping before Tros.

"We accept," he said simply. There and then Tros dubbed him Jaun and gave him the rank of a lieutenant under Sigurdsen.

They dropped anchor under the lee of chalk cliffs between the Isle of Vectis and the mainland. All three banks of oars on either side, Britons and Spaniards alternating, had been in full use for a day and there was a new energy, a new, clean finish, a new majesty to the measured swing and a deep-sea certainty about the plunge of the vermilion blades that made Tros's heart thump.

Orwic espied Caswallon first. He lowered a boat, taking his own four men and some of Tros's slaves, hurrying to meet the clumsy barge that labored out of harbor under sail and sweeps. Orwic was shouting the news before boat and barge met, so Fflur and Caswallon knew most of it already when they both embraced Tros on the *Liafail's* high poop, Fflur's eyes frankly wet, Caswallon praising the great ship to hide his own emotion.



"Men!" said Tros. "I have men!"

"Aye, and I peace! Rhys is dead. I slew him! Came Gwenhwyfar, hot-horsed, blurting out the whole of Rhys's plot. Fflur coaxed me to spare the woman, but I slew Rhys. Some said to catch and torture him, but Rhys was of the council. I would almost as soon torture my own son. I sent him warning and he understood. He took to the forest with twenty men, hoping to reach Gaul, but when I overtook him his men threw down their arms. Rhys, he drew bow but missed me by that much."

Caswallon measured off the third part of his thumb-nail and Fflur shuddered.

"My arrow went into his heart," he added, "so he died in fair fight, and the council was not dishonored. I found letters on him, written by Cæsar's secretary. He and Cæsar had it all planned, but I think Cæsar will not invade us now Rhys is dead."

Tros did not answer for the moment. Fflur saw Britomaris standing by the deckhouse door, bow and arrows in his hand as if to advertise the fact that he had fought against the Romans. She drew Caswallon's attention. Eyebrows raised, he questioned Tros.

"A poor fool," Tros said. "His wife will tame him. I tamed Gwenhwyfar."

Caswallon laughed.

"She is as tame as the wind! But we endure the wind. I think you have tamed Cæsar. What is it? Four ships sunk?"

"Three. One escaped. Cæsar will learn whom he may thank. What of Rhys's men whom I hold hostage?"

"All Rhys's property is mine. I give them to you. Hah! How Cæsar will be chewing flints in Gaul! Three biremes and —"

Tros interrupted.

"Caswallon, mend your fences! For love of you and Britain I will go to Rome. I will do my utmost to break Cæsar's wheel. If I fail, then mark you, Cæsar will invade Britain as surely as we see each other!"

"We must pray more to the gods," said Fflur.

"The gods," he said, "make opportunities. Prayer consists in seizing opportunities. That is how Cæsar prays! I also. I prayed for Spaniards! I have them. Pray you for a stout heart, wisdom, and the men, men, men!"

## Chapter IV

*"PLUTO! SHALL I SET FORTH FULL OF DREADS  
AND QUESTIONS?"*

*Whence I came, I know. Whither I go, I know not. Here I am. I know not why these things are, nor what they shall be. But I discover that if I choose not, I am chosen; and I love the valiance of choosing rather than the vain, unvaliant obedience to ease, which I perceive is slavery.*

*Unvaliant scud I am not, blown on the gales of circumstance. Valiance, I think, shall not die, though the storm may wreck me and the waves drown.*

*What is valiance? I know not. But I love it, and it loves me. Let us see whither valiance leads.*

From the Log of Tros of Samothrace

Farewell to Caswallon was an event. There was something mystic in the air off Vectis. The cry of the gulls that circled around the great ship was the music of far horizons. Tros felt himself an agent of Destiny. He wore his purple cloak for the occasion, and his sword in its vermilion scabbard hung from a belt set with jewels. His eyes glowed beneath the gold band that encircled his forehead. The crushing obstinacy of his jaw and chin, the oak-strength of his neck and the masterful lines of mouth and nostril were exposed for whoso would to read. One would oppose him at one's own risk.

"We will see," he remarked, and the three words told his character.

A druid leaned forward from a seat beside the cabin door, mildly rebuking:

"You will see too much. You are like a bull that breaks the fences. Because you have been told the world is round —"

Tros interrupted. He laughed.

"I will prove it. I will sail around it."

"At your own risk!" the druid answered. "We have trusted you. In Britain you have built your ship with Britons' aid, of British oak and sheathed with British tin. Her sails and her ropes are of British flax. Your slaves, more than half of her crew, are all Britons whom the Lord Caswallon gave to you."

"The Lord Tros earned them," said Caswallon, gesturing with a blue-stained, white, enormous hand.

Tros smiled, and their eyes met. Those two understood each other far better than either of them understood the druid.

"We gave you pearls out of our treasure," said the druid. "Those were for a purpose."

"Aye," Tros answered, leaning back against the table, squeezing the edge of it in both hands until knuckles and muscles stood out in knots. A sort of thrifty look was in his eyes now. "A man can not keep such a ship as mine on nothing. Wind blows us, but the men eat meat. There is more wear and tear to pay for than a landsman thinks. I will make a profit, but I will not forget to serve you in the making."

"Not if you turn aside to prove what you have no business to know," the druid answered. "Whether the world is round or flat — and mark you, on that I am silent — your friends, to whom you are beholden, are in peril."

Caswallon snorted like a war-horse, but Fflur laid a jeweled hand on him and, with her dark gray eyes, begged silence.

"When I forget my friends, may all the gods for-

get me," Tros said solemnly, frowning, not liking that his promise should be called in question. "I itch, I ache, I yearn to prove the world is round. But I know better than to fare forth on that quest and leave promises unkept behind me. Not while Cæsar is free to invade Britain will I reckon myself free to spread sail straight toward the setting sun. In Rome, as I have told you half a hundred times, are Cæsar's enemies, his friends and all the riffraff who will take whichever side is uppermost. One way or another I will break the spokes of Cæsar's wheel before I set forth on my own adventure. If I fail in Rome, I will come back to Britain and help you."

Fflur shook her head.

"You will never return," she remarked. "That is why I wish Orwic were not sailing with you."

Orwic laughed. "Tros is like the northeast wind. I love him. I will go around the world with him," he said. "But I wish he had horses instead of a ship!"

He took up the peaked iron helmet he had laid on the table, turned it bottom upward and began to rock it like a boat.

"However, I overcame the vomiting last voyage when we took the Spaniards. I am a sailor."

Jaun Aksue shook his head:

"Wait until you have seen the sea! All you have played on yet is this streak of water between Gaul and Britain."

The druid, watching opportunity, resumed the thread of his remarks, while Aksue and Orwic eyed each other, mutually critical.

"Lord Tros, how will you reach Rome? Ostia lies leagues from Rome. You can not sail this ship up the Tiber, which is the Roman river. We druids are informed concerning such things."

"Yes, and you know the world is round!" Tros retorted, grinning at him.

But the druid held to his point.

"How will you go to Rome? Will you dare to leave your ship at Ostia? What is to prevent the Ro-



mans from seizing your ship? They will charge you with piracy. Your father held a Roman license to sail anywhere he pleased; yet how many times have you told us that Cæsar charged him with piracy and flogged the crew to death simply because he disapproved of Cæsar's policy?"

"Zeus!" Tros exploded, spreading his shoulders and kicking his scabbard. "I cross bridges when I reach them."

"There is a bridge to Rome," the druid answered. "It is Gades. Go first of all to Gades."

"I might," Tros answered. "I have a friend in Gades who owes me money. The place is a Roman port, but the gods approve a man who seizes danger by the snout."

"Now listen," said the druid, "for you sail soon, and I would not delay you. You are a bold man and cunning. Danger is only a challenge to your will. But there will be dangers to the left and to the right, before and behind."

"Pluto! Shall I set forth full of dreads and questions? Had I listened to the yawpings of disaster's friends I should never have set foot in Britain! I should never have sunk Cæsar's fleet, never have built my own ship, never have gathered a crew, never have found the stuff to make the hot stink for my catapults! Do you bid me go forth full of fear?"

"Nay, but I bid you beware of risks."

Tros's amber eyes blazed proudly.

"I am the master of the biggest ship that ever sailed these seas! 'Beware of risks!' saith the Lord Druid. Half a thousand souls and all my fortune at the risk of wind and tide, reefs, shoals, gales on the Atlantic, every Roman on the seas my enemy, myself proscribed, three talents on my head, pirates, water and provisions to obtain in harbors that swarm with Cæsar's friends — 'Be cautious!' saith the Lord Druid!"

"Be bold, Lord Trôs!" said Fflur, her gray eyes watching his. But the druid signed to her not to interfere.

"Trust Tros," laughed Orwic. "I tell you he is bolder than the northeast wind!"

Tros struck a gong and glanced at the three water clocks. A Northman appeared in the doorway.

"Tide?" said Tros.

"Still making. Nearly at the ebb, my lord."

"Order the blankets stowed below. Wind?"

"Light breeze from the eastward."

"Mist?"

"All clear, my lord. Sven at the masthead says he can see the coast of Gaul."

"There," said Tros, "is the answer of the gods to all your doubts! A fair wind!"

He began to pace the cabin floor, his hands behind him, kicking at his scabbard as he turned. The druid watched him, alert for an opening into which to drive an admonition. Tros offered him none. The druid had to resume the subject uninvited.

"Lord Tros, those Eskualdenak of yours are Cæsar's men. If they should be caught, they would be crucified — and you along with them. Yet unless you go to Gades first, it is impossible for you to go to Ostia and Rome. I tell you, in the midst of danger you shall find the keys of safety. But beware of black arts and of violence. There are some who may be bought and some not. We druids have read the stars."

"Rot me all riddles!" Tros answered irritably, but the druid ignored the remark.

"Lord Tros, I could direct you to a man in Gades, who would give you information. But I see you are not open-minded. None the less, you are a brave man and your heart is true to friendship, so I will do what may be done for you."

Tros bowed. He thought more of a druid's blessing than of his material advice. To his mind the druids had lost contact between spiritual thought and the action that a man must take with two feet on the ground.

"I go," he said, turning to Caswallon, for he felt

the ship's changed motion as the anchor-cable slackened and the wind made her dance a little on the ebb.

The druid, Caswallon and Fflur stood up to take their leave of him and Fflur's gray eyes were moist. Caswallon's face, normally good-humored and amused, wore a mask of stolidness to hide emotion that he scorned as womanly. Orwic looked bored, since that was his invariable refuge from the spurs of sentiment.

"I go," Tros repeated, and stood straight before them all, the light through the door on his face, and his lion's eyes glowing against it with the light that blazed up from within. He was minded they should have a bold friend and a brave sight to remember in the dark days coming, when their country should await invasion, and himself afar off. He was minded they should not believe it possible he would neglect to serve them to the last breath and the last ounce of his energy.

"It is thanks to you," he said, "that I have my ship that was my heart's desire, and I will not forget you. It may be I will never come again. I am no druid, and I can not see, like Fflur, with the eyes of destiny. But know ye this: I am a friend in need as in prosperity. Ye may depend on me to worry Cæsar's rear until he turns away from Britain. But be ready for invasion, because Cæsar certainly intends to try a second time.

"If he invades, resist him to the last ditch, to the last fence, to the last yard of your realm. And though they tell you I am dead or have betrayed you — for Cæsar's favorite weapon is false rumor — know that I persist until the end in trying all means to weaken Cæsar from the rear. All means I will try. Truth I will tell to those who will believe it. I will lie, and craftily, to them who deal in lies. Fairly I will deal with honest men. So the gods shall aid me. But believe ye in your own star as well as in my friendship."

"Good-by!" Fflur said, choking, and embraced him.

Orwic turned away and strode out through the open door. He hated scenes. His eyes were wet,

which would not do at all. He was a British gentleman. Caswallon, muttering "Lud's blood!" swung Tros toward him by the arms and smote him on the breast a time or two.

"Tros, Tros!" he said, forcing a grin. "I would rather you would stay here and share Lud's luck with us! It grieves me that you go."

"Friendship begets grief!" Tros answered, patting the tall, fair-haired chief between the shoulder-blades. "Grief eats courage, so beware of it. Caswallon, my friend, you and I were not born to mope like vultures over vain regrets. Friendship is a fire that tests both parties to it, so let you and me stand firmer, the more circumstances strain. It heartens me to know that you and Fflur have called me friend. I go forth proud of it!"

"Go then!" Caswallon answered, making his voice gruff lest it should tremble. "Lud's luck go with you! And know this: Come what may — come rumor, and though all the world and Cæsar swear you have played us false, we will believe in you!"

"Tide!" That was Sigurdsen's voice from the poop. "Tide and a fair wind!"

There came a whistle in-between-decks, where the captains of the oar-banks piped all rowers to the benches; then a clatter as the oar-blades rattled on the ports.

"Haul short!" Sigurdsen again. And then a sing-song and a clanking at the capstan.

Tros led the way on deck. Extravagantly he had ordered the purple sails bent for the occasion. His eyes went aloft to where the Northmen lay on the yards to shake them loose. He turned his back on Orwic, because Fflur wept on the young man's shoulder, and he knew what agonies of shame and nervousness that scene imposed on a British aristocrat. Orwic's funny little peaked helmet had been pushed over one eye, and he was biting his moustache. Caswallon laughed, which brought a curse to Orwic's



lips, but Tros leaned overside and shouted at the crew of fishermen who were bringing alongside the barge on which the druid, Caswallon and Fflur were to go ashore.

"Easy! Easy, you lubbers! If you scrape my paint — Out fenders there!" He had spent a goodly percentage of Cæsar's gold on sulphur and quick-silver to make the ship's sides splendid with vermillion.

There had to be more embracing before Fflur went overside. The British had a sort of ritual of parting. It broke all restraint. But Tros, for the sake of the crew, preserved his air of grandeur.

He stood the whole deck crew at quarters and saluted with a burst of trumpets and a roll of drums as Fflur and Caswallon went down the ladder. Then he turned to face the druid, for the druid waited.

There came a silence on deck and aloft. The druid, with his eyes on Tros, drew out the golden sickle from his girdle. He was mild-eyed, but the eyes were bright with fasting and with having contemplated stars and Mysteries.

"In the midst of danger thou shalt find the keys of safety," he repeated. "Win Rome in Gades!"

Then the sickle, flashing in the sunlight, moved in mystic circles over Tros's head, severing whatever threads of hidden influence might bind him to the sources of disaster. Upraised, it received, as does the new moon, affluence and wisdom; reversed, it out-poured blessings on his head. Point first, it touched his breast above the heart, invoking honesty and courage; presently it passed in ritual of weaving movements before eyes, ears, nose, lips, hands and feet, arousing all resourcefulness, then tapped each shoulder to confer the final blessing. Then the druid spoke:

"Offspring of Earth, Air, Fire, Water and the Nameless, go forth accoutred. As a sun's ray, go thou forth! A light amid the darkness! A land among the waters!

A friend among the friendless, and a serpent!\* Be a strength amid the weakness! Be a man amid the elements! Whereso thy foot shall tread, be justice done! Whatso thy tongue shall speak, be truth unveiled! Be strong! Be of the gods who give and guide and not of them who snare and take away! That voice within thee, judge thee! Be thy hand the servant of thy soul!"

Blessing ship and crew with arms upraised, lips moving to the said-to-be-forgotten Word, the druid turned and went, all keeping silence until, like some white-haired pilot of the years, he had descended to the waiting barge.

"Up anchor!" Tros roared. Then, as the clanking capstan brought the cable in, "Make sail there! Sheet her home!"

The purple sails spread fluttering and bellied as the ship swung slowly on the tide before the light breeze. On the poop Tros raised his baton. Drums and cymbals crashed. The oars went out in three long banks on either side. Cymbals for the "ready" and then crash of brass and alternating drum-beat as the water boiled alongside and the great ship leaped ahead, her serpent's tongue a-flicker in the sun.

"I am a man! I live! I laugh!" Tros told himself as he eyed those purple sails and turned to wave his hand toward the barge that danced amid the gulls along the white wake astern.

## Chapter V

### OFF GADES

*Sent I a fool on my errand? It was I who sent him. Counted I not on his folly? That is my fault. Though he suffer for it, it was I who sent him. It is I who*

\* The symbol of wisdom.

*pay, unless I counted on his folly to decoy an adversary, who might have been cautious unless he perceived he had a fool to deal with.*

From the Log of Tros of Samothrace

How to put into a port controlled by Romans, with part of his crew composed of two hundred and fifty deserters of Cæsar's army, without falling foul of Cæsar's letters of proscription was a problem that Tros left to the gods to clear up for him, although he already had a hint of the solution in his mind. Meanwhile, there was work a-plenty — head winds and off-shore winds, flat calms with a heavy ground-swell that made the bucking rowers grunt, and squally weather in which whales played all around the ship, nearly causing a mutiny because he would not let Jaun Aksue and his Eskualdenak turn aside to hunt them.

"Thus we kill whales. With a spear we slay them. It is easy. We will slay two. You may tow them into Gades,\* making haste because the sharks will follow, eating at their undersides. The dead whales float, I promise you, and they are worth much money. Romans buy the meat; the traders buy the bone; the Spaniards buy the skin for sandals, shields, mule-harness — "

"Let live," Tros answered. "I hunt bigger fish."

"Aye, but you pay us nothing. Give us a chance to turn the whale meat into money, that we may drink in Gades. I tell you, Lord Tros, we haven't tasted red wine since the sour, thin stuff that Cæsar fed to us. We Eskualdenak are noblemen, who like to get drunk now and then."

But one of the things that Tros had learned in many foreign ports was the difference between a crew mad drunk on its own earned money, and the same crew equally drunk on its master's bounty.

"You shall drink at my expense in Gades," he re-

\* The modern Cadiz.

marked, and the tawny-haired soldier of fortune swaggered forward where he discussed with his companions the pros and cons of taking the ship away from Tros and hunting whales until she was full of the bone and blubber.

But for three days and three nights waves, tide, current and the wind fought Tros for the mastery. No sight of sun, no stars nor moon, nothing to gage direction by except the shrieking wind and — now and then when he dared it — thunder of the surf against high cliffs.

But Tros only approached the lee shore twice to find a headland that he recognized, and that was after he had left the dreaded rocks and isles of Finis Terræ\* far astern.

Twice — yet he made his landfall. He hove the ship to, within sight of Gades Bay in the late afternoon of the eleventh day out from Vectis, sending three men to the mastheads to keep watch for Roman ships. He covered the serpent's head with 'paulin lest the setting sun should glitter on its gold-leaf and attract attention. His ship was notched against the western sky, but her vermilion top-sides merged into the sunset splurge, and it was possible her masts might not be seen if none was actually watching for them.

Seated at the table in the cabin he clipped a piece of parchment from a roll, mixed gum with sepia from cuttlefish, chewed the point of a pen to his liking and sent for Orwic.

"Lud love me, Tros, but the land smells good!" said Orwic, making himself easy on Tros's bunk.

"Can you speak the Roman tongue?" Tros asked him.

"You know I can't. When I was a boy I learned a few words from a Roman trader who was cast up on the beach. He was killed soon afterwards for taking liberties with women. Even in the battle on the beach last year I couldn't remember a word of it. I wanted

\* The modern Finisterre and Isle of Ushant.

to yell the wrong commands to Cæsar's men and confuse them until our chariots could ride them down and —"

Tros interrupted, leaning forward with an elbow on the table.

"Gaulish? Can you speak that with a Gaulish accent?"

"Near enough. You know as well as I do that we Britons speak the same tongue as the Gauls. What ails you, Tros? Your eyes look like a madman's. Are you shipsick?"

"Do you dare —" his voice was hoarse with the strain of bellowing his orders to the crew and from the long vigil through the storm — "do you dare to go ashore to-night with Conops to guide you, to the house of a friend of mine?"

Orwic barked delightedly.

"Friend Tros, I would swim to Gades, just for the feel of good earth!"

"This is a worse risk than a swim. Fail — there is a low hill behind Gades, outside the city wall, where cross-roads meet. The hill bristles with dead trees that bear ill-smelling fruit. The Romans flog a man before they crucify him, flog him until his intestines hang and —"

"Rot me talk of failure!" Orwic answered. "Tell me what shall be if I succeed."

"*Tchutt!* I must go myself. I need a cautious man."

"Lud's belly! Tros, you shall not! Listen! Who has better right than I to run a risk for my friends in Britain?"

Orwic leaned across the table. His face flushed. He looked as handsome as Apollo.

"Some man," Tros said, "who will take care. No hot-head can succeed in this adventure."

"Tros, I blow cold! I am as crafty as a fox! I forswear horsemanship! I never rode a horse! I never drove a chariot! I am a tortoise! Burn me this great creaking lumber-wain of a tin-bellied boat, and set me on dry land! I am a paragon of caution! Dumb I



am, a lurker in shadows, a rap-a-door-and-run man! Tros, there is none aboard this ship who can do half as well!"

Tros knew it, but he kept the knowledge to himself and let Orwic do all the persuading.

"I need a modest man. The gods love modesty," he said with the air of a money-lender refusing to do business.

"I am modesty!" said Orwic.

"You!" Tros leaned back in his oaken chair and laughed. "Modest? Three nights gone I heard you praying that the storm might cease, instead of praising the sea's splendor and returning thanks for guts enough to ride it out!"

"It was the Northmen prayed," said Orwic.

"Aye. But who bade them? Who paid them? Who gave Skram, the skald,\* a gold-piece for his pains? I saw you."

"Tros, you see too much. Our British gods are of field and river. These Northmen are sailors and their gods are —"

"Cripples!" Tros exploded. "Rot me such a god as likes to see good seamen on their knees! There are gods in Gades, Orwic, but they'll go their own gait. It's for the man who does my work to-night to suit their whimsies, not they his."

"Well, I will be whimsical," said Orwic. "The gods shall like me very well."

He stooped and scooped up sand out of the box that was kept in readiness to put out fire, and heaped six handfuls of the wet stuff on the table. Then he smoothed it out.

"So, draw me Gades. Show me the house I must find."

"Conops knows the house," said Tros, but he drew, none the less, with his forefinger, beginning

\* A kind of minstrel with peculiar privileges. Like the old-time Scottish Highlanders, who never went on foray without their piper, the Northmen always took their skald on an adventure oversea.

with a circle for the city wall, then marking the five gates and making dots to represent the forum, the temple of Venus and the gladiators' barracks, with a veritable maze of streets between. "This is the governor's house. Avoid it as you would death! Now, from the western gate due eastward, do you see? Then this way, to the right, to a point about midway along the street. Turn your back to the west, and forward. The house of Simon the Jew stands nearly at the apex of a triangle that has for base the street between the forum and the gladiators' school.

"It is a house built half of timber, half of mud, smeared with a yellow plaster that will make it look like stone by night. Simon is a rich Jew with the privilege of armed slaves — quite a few of them. There will be dozens of dogs in the street and the Gades dogs are bad, I warn you. There used to hang a lantern on a chain from the front of Simon's house to the wall opposite. The citizenry have used that chain a time or two to hang night prowlers. None can approach the house unseen because the lamp has several wicks and casts a bright light."

"I will walk up brazenly," said Orwic.

"And you will find the brassiest-faced Jews in Europe ready for you! They live in the narrow streets near-by and look to Simon to protect them with his influence. They'll swarm out with stones in their hands at the first bleat from Simon's slaves. But there's worse than they. The city is patrolled by armed slaves who belong to the municipium.\* The place is ten times better policed than Rome, and there's a law against being out at night without being able to prove lawful business. It is no light task I set you. I think I had better leave you here and go myself."

"Tros, I tell you, I go! I will be safe enough in a

\* The local government. Gades was not yet in fact a municipium. Local officials were appointed and removed at pleasure by the Roman governor.

Roman costume. They will take me for some gallant pursuing a love affair."

"In the Jews' quarter? I think not," said Tros. "A man may buy a Jewess in the open market almost anywhere where slaves are sold, but no man in his senses goes philandering near a ghetto after dark! The Jews can fight! And if you beat on Simon's door, his slaves will rush out and cudgel you."

"Conops shall beat the door," said Orwic. "While the slaves beat Conops, I will slip into the house."

"Cockerel! I wouldn't lose Conops for his weight in money!"

"Very well. I can wait until dawn outside the house and —"

"No. By morning Simon must have visited my ship. Now listen. Try to forget you are Caswallon's nephew and a prince of Britain. Only remember you are charged with secret business. If you try to show how smart you are, the gods will raise a wall of circumstance around you that will test your wits to the extremity. Go modestly, and they will modify the odds. Bear that in mind. Now, muck me this sand away — so. To the floor with it. Let that Jaun Spaniard clean it up. The rascal rots with laziness. Now, I will write the letter."

He spoke as one who contemplated making magic, and for a while, for the sake of exercising Orwic's patience, he sat listening to the murmur of the short waves overside. Then he wrote swiftly, using Greek, pausing line by line to read aloud and construe it to Orwic:

"Tros, the Samothracian, to Simon, son of Tobias, the Jew of Alexandria, in Gades, greeting.

"Be the bearer as a son to you. He is Orwic, son of Orwic, a prince of Britain, nephew to the king who rules the Trinobantes and the Cantii, my true friend. Speak him freely.

"Knowing I have done you service in the past, whereby we both made profit, and aware you are a man of true heart and long memory, whose zeal for

great enterprises is in no wise dulled by the success that has attended many efforts in the past, I urge that you should come to me with all speed, secretly, to-night, for conference concerning matters that may profit both of us.

"Lord Orwic will attend you and convey you by the shortest way in safety to my ship.

"This is my true word. So fail not.

"Tros of Samothrace."

He sanded the letter and passed it to Orwic, who frowned at the thick Greek characters.

"Will he understand you need help? Why not tell him so?" Orwic objected.

"Because I know him!" Tros answered. "If he thought I needed help, he wouldn't come until he had driven a hard bargain first by daylight. But if he thinks there is a stroke of business I can put his way he will come in a hurry to learn the details of it."

"Better not tell him anything about your plans then?"

"Tell him all you know of them!" Tros answered drily and left the cabin to watch provisions being weighed out to the galley for the evening meal.

## Chapter VI

### VISITORS

*Why are they servants, and I master? Not being God, I know not. But I am the master. This is my ship.*

*They, when they see a danger, fear it, whereas I fear only not to see it.*

*They, when they see a danger, magnify it and become a danger to themselves. They lend it their wits. I lend not mine to be used against me.*

From the Log of Tros of Samothrace

The minute the sun dipped below the skyline Tros ordered, "Out oars!" and, taking full advantage of the tide, dropped anchor in pitch darkness almost within hail of a spit of land that jutted into the mouth of Gades Bay. The moisture-laden Virazon, the seabreeze that blows all night long between spring and autumn, had not yet broken the dead calm. There was a stench of rotting seaweed from the shore, a croon of short waves on a sandy beach and, except that, silence.

There was no moon yet, but the starlight shone with milky whiteness that revealed the ghost-white city several miles away, rising tier on tier on a peninsula that was almost an island. About half a mile from where he had anchored a beacon-light flared in an iron basket, and in the distance, to the northward of the city, was a parallelogram of crimson fires that marked the outline of a Roman camp.

By lantern-light in the after deckhouse, with the ports well shrouded, Tros watched Conops get into the costume of a Greek slave.

"Now remember to act slavish!" he instructed. "Little man, much rests on you this night! To the Lord Orwic be fussily obsequious. See that he treads in no ordure near the gate. Watch that none touches him. Carry a stick to drive the dogs away from him, and use it at the least excuse. Talk Greek to him\* no matter that he doesn't understand. To the gate custodians be insolent. If they ask your master's name and business, tell them they may have it and a whipping in the bargain to-morrow morning for their impudence. In a pinch use Simon's name, but not if you can help it, because if they learn that you are visiting Simon it might occur to them to extort a bribe from Simon by holding you both in the guardhouse until he comes."

"Trust me, master! I know Gades. There is a place

\* There was a large Greek colony in Gades, where the language was as much in use as any other at that time.



outside the city wall where dancing girls are kept before they ship them for the Asia trade. Too bad we haven't scent of jasmine to make our clothes smell of an afternoon's adventure! Never mind. I'll manage it."

Then Orwic came, jingling a purse of gold and silver coins that Tros had given him, bending to admire the fashion of a Roman pallium and tunic, loot from Cæsar's bireme.

"Walk not like a horseman!" Tros protested. "A Roman noble walks with a stride that measures out the leagues. Come, try it on deck."

Tros strode for him. Orwic imitated. Conops ran in front, pretending to drive dogs away and pointing to guide his feet from pools of filth.

"Go. Go now with the gods in mind," said Tros and turned to give orders to Sigurdson, who was to command the longboat.

"You, who were a king, so do, that if others had obeyed you formerly as you obey me now, you would be a king this day! Your weapons are for a last resort. Be silent, crafty, cunning, cautious —" he emphasized each word with his fist on the Northman's breast — "run rather than resist. If questioned, make no answer. Put one man ashore to follow the Lord Orwic and Conops as far as the city gate. Let him bring word to you when they have passed in. Come back to the ship with the information, taking care to keep the oars well muffled."

Then one last word to Orwic.

"Cover your long hair with your pallium. One gold-piece to the captain of the gate guard. One piece of silver to each of the others. No more, you'll merely whet their appetites. Lud's luck!"

The muffled oar-beats thumped away into the dark, and silence fell. The whole crew was aware of mysteries impending. Aloft, the Northmen and some of the Eskualdenak leaned out of the rigging, watching the longboat until its shape was lost in the gloom. There began then a murmur of talking between decks, where the weary rowers sprawled. Jaun Aksue

trespassed on the poop without asking permission and leaned over the rail beside Tros confidently, as if they two were equals.

"Secrecy!" he remarked grinning. "My men crave wine and shore leave. We have been eleven days at sea. The Gades girls are famous and the red wine is the best in all this land."

Tros suppressed his instinct to knock the man down. Friction might ruin the vague plan he had in mind.

"If you're caught in Gades, you'll be crucified," he answered.

"Maybe. But you have friends ashore, or you wouldn't be here," said Aksue. "You can give us shore leave. You can say we're your slaves. We'll act the part, then nobody can interfere with us. We needn't go into the city. There are taverns outside the wall and lots of women. Promise us a day ashore and some money to spend, and we'll keep as quiet as mice 'til morning. Otherwise, I won't answer for what my men will do."

Tros found it easy enough now to tolerate the impudence. That those proud Eskualdenak were willing to act the part of slaves solved more than half of the problem that had racked his brain for days and nights on end. He nodded.

"You shall go ashore."

"And money?"

"I will arrange it. Go and warn your men that if there's any noise to-night, no shore leave!"

For an hour he paced the poop anxiously. There might be Roman guard-ships on the prowl, and he had given hostages to fortune. He could not desert Orwic and Conops.

At the end of an hour he heard splashing, and thought it was dolphins or porpoises. Then, staring into the darkness, he was nearly sure he saw the outline of a boat.

"Sigurdsen!" he shouted. No answer. It was much too soon to expect Sigurdsen in the longboat.

But the splashing continued. Presently he saw two human heads within a few feet of the ship's side. A voice that he thought was a woman's cried out to him in Greek to throw a rope. He went himself and lowered the rope ladder, ordering the deck-watch to the other bulwark. A man and a woman climbed up like wet shadows and stood dripping in the dark in front of him. The woman wore nothing but a Greek chlamys, with the wreck of a wreath of flowers tangled in her wet hair; the man had on a Roman tunic, that clung and revealed a lithe, athletic figure. They were nearly of a size. In the dark they looked like children up to mischief.

"Tros!" said the woman. Tros nearly jumped out of his skin.

Had he been recognized before he even set foot in Gades?

Gesturing with a jerk of the head and arm, he led the way toward the cabin, where he might learn the worst without the deck-watch hearing it.

At the door he paused and let them pass in ahead of him. For a minute he stood, making sure that the deck-watch were not near enough for eavesdropping, wondering how many of them had seen the swimmers come aboard. When he entered the cabin the girl had already clothed herself in his own best purple cloak, that had been hanging on the rail between the bunk and the bulkhead.

"Tros!" she said. "Tros of Samothrace!" She laughed at him, seeming no worse for her swim, although the man was squatting on the floor and looked exhausted. She curtsied with a rhythm of bare legs. There was no fear in her eyes, nor even challenge, but a confidence expressed in laughter and a gesture of disarming comradeship.

"Lord Tros," she began again.

"I am not Tros," he answered sullenly.

Of all the difficulties in the world he dreaded most a complication with women.

"Oh, yes, you are!" she answered. "Horatius Verres

saw your ship at sunset notched against the sky. He recognized it instantly. He was in hiding on the roof of Pkauchios' *ergastulum*.\* He is a runaway from Gaul. I am Chloe, the dancer, Pkauchios' slave. I am the favorite of Gades," she added, as if she were not particularly proud of it but simply stating fact.

"What do you want?" Tros asked sullenly. That the girl's ivory-white skin shone golden in the whale-oil lantern light, and that her face was like a cameo against the shadow, only deepened his mistrust. He retired two paces from her and stood with his back against the door.

"Only what I can get!" she answered, and sat on Tros's bunk, arranging his pillows behind her, covering her bare knees with his blanket. "I could tell Balbus, the governor, who you are, but I won't if you will bargain fairly."

Tros glanced at the man on the floor, who was slapping his head to get the water from his ears.

"As prisoners —" he suggested.

Chloe interrupted, laughing.

"I am a slave who owns slaves. My women know where I am. I have two men-slaves waiting on the beach."

"Who is this fellow?" Tros asked.

"I told you. Horatius Verres. He had a little difficulty with the Romans and had to run away from Gaul. If what he said is true, he lost his heart to a girl whom Cæsar coveted — some young matron, I suppose, or Cæsar wouldn't have looked twice at her. Some one, to earn Cæsar's favor, accused poor Horatius Verres of accepting bribes to give Cæsar an excuse to send him to Rome in fetters and keep the woman for himself. She found out the plot in time and warned him. So he slew the informer and tried to escape to Britain in one of four biremes that Cæsar was sending along with some Eskualdenak to invade that country.

\* A private prison kept for the punishment of slaves.

"Somebody," she looked merrily at Tros — "attacked those biremes, destroyed three of them, and captured a lot of Eskualdenak. The fourth bireme escaped to Gaul with Horatius Verres still on board, but he swam away before they reached port and escaped a second time overland. He reached Gades in a dreadful state, but I could see he was a pretty boy under all the rags and whiskers, so I hid him and saved him from Balbus' labor gang, because he had told me his real name and an interesting story. I hid him on the roof of my master's *ergastulum*. Later, when he was rested, I sent him to Simon the Jew, thinking Simon might do something for him, because Simon owes me money and can't pay."

"Can't pay? You say Simon can't pay what he owes you?"

She nodded.

"You know Simon? He has lent all his money to Cæsar and Balbus."

"Go on," said Tros, his fingers clutching at his sword-hilt.

He could not have asked a greater favor from the gods than that Simon should be short of money at the moment; but he was afraid of this woman, and still more afraid lest she should realize it.

"Simon was shocked and virtuous," she continued. "He would have informed Balbus if I hadn't reminded him of a few little things I know about himself. He agreed to say nothing, but he was afraid to do anything, so Horatius Verres had to return to his hiding place. I was asleep this afternoon when he sighted your ship from the roof of the *ergastulum*, but he called to me through the window of my cottage in Pkauchios' garden and said he would be safe if he could reach your ship, so I came with him to help him pass the gate guards, and then came out here for the fun of it. I wanted to see Tros the Samothracian."

"And are you satisfied?" Tros asked her.

He knew the reputation of the Gades dancing girls — intrigue, well-educated villainy, greed, ulterior



motives. He was sure that this one would not have dared to visit him unless convinced of her own safety. Perhaps she knew Orwic and Conops were ashore, and was counting on them as hostages to prevent her from being carried off to sea before daylight.

She looked at him long and steadily, then nodded with a little uplift of her Grecian nose and a droop of the eyelids that suggested confidence in her own skill to read character.

"Why did you come to Gades?" she asked. "Balbus, the governor, knows you are a pirate. I have heard him talk of it."

"I came to see Simon," Tros answered, and watched her to judge the effect.

By her face, by her manner, by the sudden, puzzled frown with a hint of speculation underlying it, he judged that she did not know about his having sent two messengers ashore. And her next words confirmed the guess.

"Simon has much less influence than my master Pkauchios, who is an astrologer whom all men fear. If you will hide Horatius Verres on your ship, I will speak for you to Pkauchios. He is almost the only man who dares to go to Balbus at any hour of the night. He would make Balbus afraid to interfere with you, by talking about the stars and portents and all that nonsense. Then, what do you want to do? You know —" she looked at him keenly and impudently — "you can buy me. I have much influence in Gades."

"How much are you worth?" Tros asked her.

"My value in the market? Two hundred thousand sesterces!\* You don't believe it? Pkauchios had to pay the tax on that amount. He entered me on the list at much less, but the Roman who had farmed the taxes from Balbus ordered me sold at auction, so

\* About eight thousand, five hundred dollars — a very high, but not an unheard-of price for a slave who could make enormous profits for her master.

Pkauchios had to admit the higher value and pay a tax on the sale in the bargain. But I did not mean you should buy me. I meant you can buy my influence."

But in a world full of uncertainties, if there was one thing sure, it was that buying dancing women's influence was as unthrifty a proceeding as to throw the money overboard. The only end of it would be the bottom of the thrower's purse. Tros stared at Horatius Verres.

"How did you obtain her influence?" he asked. "Did you pay for it?"

The man smiled and troubled himself to rise before he answered.

"Money?" he asked with a shrug of his shoulders. He had all the gestures of a well-bred man, and he was handsome in a dark way, although his eyes were rather close together. "I made love to her."

"I won't enslave you," said Tros, "but I won't trust you until I know you better."\*

Verres bowed acknowledgement.

"I am grateful," he said, smiling again with a peculiar boyish up-twist of the mouth.

Tros was about to speak again, but the deck-watch shouted, and a man pounded the cabin door.

"Sigurdsen comes!"

Tros had to go on deck or else summon Sigurdsen into the cabin. He did not want the deck crew in his confidence. He signed to Chloe and Verres to hide themselves in the dark corner, where his clothes hung between bunk and bulkhead.

## Chapter VII

### GADES BY NIGHT

*Mastery? Its secret? Hah! Self-mastery! But few be-*

\* It would have been quite simple for Tros lawfully to enslave Verres. For instance, on arrival at some other port he could have presented a bill for passage money, and if Verres did not pay that, he could attach his person for debt.

*lieve it; it is so simple that few attempt it. Many who attempt it fail because it is so simple. He who has it blames not failure on the disobedience of others, though he punish and reward. Reward and punishment are for the ignorant, who think that God, or the gods, or unknown powers send disaster. Self-mastery lets in intelligence to disobey the promptings of disaster. He who is master of himself, he is also master of events. Disaster shall serve his purpose, and why not? Disaster has neither brains nor heart nor understanding.*

From the Log of Tros of Samothrace

Orwic jumped on to the seaweed-littered beach, slipped on a heap of the slimy stuff and sprawled among the scampering crabs, where Conops helped him to his feet.

"A bad omen, Lord Orwic. A bad omen!"

But the Britons were not addicted to the vice of reading omens in every accident.

"Go back in the boat, if you're afraid," he answered. So Conops started to lead the way on the five-mile walk toward the city across a dark, ill-smelling wilderness of sand and scrub where anything might happen. And Sigurdson sent Skram, the skald, to follow them.

They found a road after a while, with a stinking ditch on either side of it, and before long saw the lights of the drinking booths, brothels and slaughter yards outside the wall, where there was neither day nor night but one long pandemonium of vice and lawlessness. And soon after that the first of the scavenger dogs, prowling in search of stray goats or forgotten offal, winded them and started a yelp that brought the pack.

Thereafter, they had to fight their way with knife and stick, not daring to gather stones lest the ferocious brutes should snatch that opportunity to rush them as they stooped. But the noise called no attention from the slums, where a dog-fight in the

dark was nothing new, and when Skram, judging he was close enough to the gates, lay down to watch, the dogs devoted all their efforts to attacking him, leaving Orwic and Conops free to approach the gate with a semblance of Roman dignity. There Conops took command.

There was a foot-gate in the midst of one side of the double, iron-strapped wooden one that had been closed at sunset; and in the midst of the small gate was a grilled opening that the guard could look through, and above that a lantern on an iron bracket.

Long before they came into the lantern light Conops began talking fussily in Greek.

"This way, master! That way! Mind the muck here! Dionysus! But the wine those rascals sell has madness in it! Master, master, try to walk straight!" Any one who understood Greek could not help but know that a Roman gentleman was coming from an evening's entertainment.

"There, master, give me your purse and lean against that wall while I call the gate guard!"

Conops set his ugly face against the grill and whistled.

"Quick!" he commanded. "My master is drunk, and ill-tempered because he has been robbed."

"Who is he?" a voice asked through the grill.

"None of your business! Be quick, unless the lot of you want to be whipped in the morning!"

"Was he robbed of his purse?"

"Zeus! No. What do you take me for? I keep his purse."

"Well, you know what it costs. One gold-piece from each of you to the man on duty, and then the officer — he makes his own terms!"

"Fool!" Conops roared at him. "Open! If you knew who waits you'd tremble in your mongrel skin!"

The guard vanished. A moment later Conops heard him reporting through the guard-house window to his officer, and he made haste to improve the passing moment.

"Master, master!" he yelled. "Don't beat me! I'm doing my best! Order those blackguards in the guard-house beaten for daring to keep you waiting. Ow! Ow! Master, that hurts!"

The captain of the guard came — a Numidian, as coal-black as the shadows, rolling the whites of his eyes in an effort to see through the grill, his breath reeking of garlic.

"Who?" he demanded.

"You'll pay smartly for it if I have to tell you!" Conops answered. "Hurry up now! Two gold-pieces for you to hold your tongue and shut your eyes. Some silver for your men. My master's drunk. I pity you, if you keep him waiting!"

A great key jangled on a ring. The lock squeaked. Conops threw his arm around Orwic, whose face was smothered in the fold of his pallium.

"Act very drunk!" he whispered, and hustled him through the narrow opening.

On the far side he pushed him into the darkest shadow, where dim rays from a lantern showed the broad blue border of a Roman tunic and the sandaled legs below it, but nothing else. There was a chink of money. The Numidian signed to half-a-dozen men to retire into the guard-house.

"Remind him when he's sober that I let him in without a fuss," he said, grinning. "Who is he?"

Conops laid a hand on the black man's shoulder and leaned toward him as if to whisper, then apparently thought better of it.

"No," he said, "mind your own business. That's wisest. I'll remind him you were civil."

"All right. Don't forget now! I'll remember you, you one-eyed Greek! If I see you and ask a favor some time —"

But Conops was gone, his left arm around Orwic and his right hand closed on something that, it seemed, he valued — possibly the purse. The captain of the gate guard may have thought so.

"Act drunk — drunk — drunker than that!" he whispered. "Strike a blow at me!"



It was too early for the streets to be deserted and the danger was of meeting Romans or some citizen who might imagine he recognized the drunken man and speak to him for the fun of it. But the street was crooked and the upper stories of the houses leaned out overhead until they almost met, creating a tunnel of gloom into which the yellow light of doors and windows streamed at intervals. The moment they were out of sight of the guard-house Conops advised a change of tactics.

"Now sober! Now walk swiftly, as if we had serious business. Stride, man! Stride out! Remember you're a Roman!"

But the spirit of adventure was in Orwic's veins. It was the first time he had seen a foreign city. Men who stood in doorways, house-fronts, litters of the wealthy merchants borne on the shoulders of slaves — all was new to him and stirred his curiosity. Above all, as they threaded through the maze of narrow streets, the glimpse through certain open doors attracted him. For Gades had not yet been zoned, as Rome was, more or less, and as Lunden did not need to be. There were cavernous, white-washed cellars visible from mid-street, in which women danced to the jingling strains of strings and castanets.

Naked-bellied women ran from one door, seizing Orwic, trying to drag him in to drink and witness Gadean indecency. One pulled away the pallium that hid the lower portion of his face and Conops struck at her too late; she glimpsed the long, fair hair that fell to the Briton's shoulders, screamed of it, tried to tug the pallium again.

"*Haie*, girls! A barbarian! A rich barbarian! Let's teach him."

The owner of the place came out, a bull-necked Syrian who tried to keep Conops at bay while the slave-women struggled to hustle their quarry down steps into the cellar whence the din of music and the reek of wine emerged. The scuffle drew attention from a guard of the municipium, street-corner lurking,

watching for a chance to blackmail somebody. He came on the run and, wise in all the short cuts to extortion, picked on Conops as a slave worth money, worth redeeming from the lock-up.

Too quick for him, Conops stepped into the light that streamed from the cellar doorway, showed him something in the palm of a secretive hand. Whatever it was, the Syrian saw it, too, and drove the women down the cellar steps. The guard of the municipium strolled away, the Syrian grew laughingly apologetic. Conops led up-street in haste and around three corners before he paused and let Orwic come abreast.

"What did you show him?" Orwic asked.

"Oh, only a bronze badge I stole from the fool Numidian at the gate."

They reached the wide street running crosswise of the city — wide, that was, for Gades, where there was no wheeled traffic because of the house-fronts that jutted out promiscuously and the arches and bottle-necked passages — passed a temple of Venus, rawly new, of imported Sicilian marble, where Orwic's British eyes stared scandalized at the enormous figure of the naked goddess colored in flesh tints and bathed in the flickering light of torches, and turned due eastward, up an alley between high, blind walls where the air smelt stale and filthy and there was not room for two men to pass without squeezing.

There, in the stinking dark, men slept who had to be stepped over carefully. Some swore when awakened and followed with drawn knives, so that Conops walked backward, his own long knife-blade tapping on the wall to give the night-pads warning he was armed.

And there were high doors in the walls, set in dark and unexpected corners, where men lurked who stepped out suddenly and blocked the way, demanding an alms with no humility. Conops slipped under Orwic's arm and trounced one of them with the handle of his knife, whereafter Orwic called for consultation.

"Tros recommended caution," he remarked. "We

can not fight all the thieves in Gades. Yet if we fee one rascal he will call his gang to murder us for the purse. We should be better off in the cellar where the women were; they might have taken our money without killing us, or so it seems to me. Pick me up that rascal. Has he breath left? Can he speak? So. Offer him silver to lead us to the house of Simon and keep other rogues at bay."

So, for a while they went preceded by a man in rags who announced in low growls to fellow-prowlers of the Gades underworld that these were privileged night-passengers who had paid their footing, and none offered to molest them after that, except one leper, who demanded to be paid to keep his filthy sores at a distance. He was of the aristocracy of beggardom and bound by no guild restrictions.

And so into the ghetto, where another sort of night-life teemed in crowded alleyways. Iron-barred windows and a reek of pickled fish; sharp voices raised in argument; song, pitched in minor melancholy with an undertone of triumph; secrecy suggested by the eye-holed shutters; ugliness; no open doors, yet doors that did open secretively as soon as they had passed, to afford a glimpse of the unwelcome strangers.

At the end of a few turns the beggar-guide professed to have lost himself, demanded his money and decamped. Orwic remembered the plan Tros drew in sand on the cabin table, but could not see that it faintly resembled any of these winding alleys. Conops, sailor by profession, had the bearings in his head, but could make nothing of the maze confronting them.

"Let us return to the temple of Venus and start again," he suggested. "There used to be an alley that ran nearly straight from there to Simon's house."

But Orwic plunged forward at random toward a corner where a dim lamp burned in an iron bracket. Conops warned him they were followed and struck the blade of his long knife against a door-post, but Orwic turned and stuck his foot into a door that had opened just sufficiently to give a view of him. Conops,

who knew Gades ghetto's reputation, tried to pull him back.

"Caution!" he urged.

But Orwic was already inside. There was a leather screen, and Conops could not see him. He had to follow, and the door slammed at his back. The screen masked the end of a short, narrow passage that turned into a room, where there were voices and a dim light. Conops used up a few seconds lunging in the darkness with his knife to find out who and where the man was who had slammed the door. Then he groped for the door, but failed to find the lock, his fingers running up and down smooth wood. He could hardly even find the crack between door and frame.

*"Oimoi! Olola!* Tros was mad to send a Briton!"

Some one chuckled in the darkness. He lunged with his knife at the sound, but hit nothing, then decided to try the passage and the voices and the light. But first he knocked the screen down, being a Greek strategist. A clear line of retreat, even toward a locked door, seemed better than nothing.

He found Orwic in a room whose walls were higher than its length or breadth. Somewhere in the darkness overhead there was a gallery that creaked, suggesting people up there listening, but the one dim light was below the gallery, its flickering light thrown downward by a battered bronze reflector. There was a smell of oil, spice, leather and tallow, but nothing in the room except a leather-covered table and two stools. Orwic leaned against the table. An old Jew sat facing him on one of the stools, his knees under the table and his back against the wall. The Jew wore the robes of his race and a dirty cloth cap, beneath which the oily ringlets coiled on either side of bright black eyes. He was scratching his curled beard as he contemplated Orwic.

"Simon!" said Orwic. "Simon! Simon!"

The Jew glanced at Conops, who stood sidewise in the door, tapping his knife against the post and swaying himself to see into the shadows.

"Is he drunk?" he asked, speaking Greek. "My name isn't Simon."

"Simon, son of Tobias of Alexandria," said Conops. "Where is his house? We seek him."

"Every one in Gades knows the house of Simon, son of Tobias of Alexandria," the old Jew answered. "Why do you break into my house?"

Conops showed him the bronze badge, stolen from the captain of the gate guard, but that had no effect whatever.

"Such a thing will get you into trouble," said the Jew. "You have no right to it. That belongs to a captain of the slaves of the municipium."

Conops began to be thoroughly frightened. The stealthy sounds in gallery and passage and the confident curiosity of the old Jew assured him he was in a tight place.

"Master, let's go!" he urged in Gaulish.

But Orwic could see no danger, and the Jew smiled, his lower lip protruding as he laid a lean hand on the table.

"A Gaul? Ah! And a Greek slave? Who is your master?" he asked Conops. "What does he want with Simon ben Tobias of Alexandria? What is a Gaul doing with a Greek slave? You must tell me. Come and stand here."

He pointed to the floor beside him. Conops obeyed, knife in hand, well satisfied to stand where he could hold the old Jew at his mercy at the first suggestion of attack.

"Put your knife away. Slaves are not allowed to carry weapons," said the Jew, and again Conops obeyed. He could redraw the knife in a second. "Who is your master? Why did you come to my house?"

Orwic seemed perfectly undisturbed, although he kept on sniffing at the strange smells.

"Tell him to show us the way to Simon's house," he said patiently.

"You would never be admitted into Simon's house, at this hour," said the Jew. "There are always his



slaves in the street, and they protect his house unless they know you. Do they know you?"

"Tell him," said Orwic, "that we have a letter for Simon."

But the Jew seemed to understand the Gaulish perfectly.

"Show me!" he remarked, and held his hand out.

"Don't you, master! Don't you!" Conops urged, but Orwic did not understand the Greek. He had supposed the Jew demanded money to show the way.

The Jew's eyes gleamed in the direction of the door. Conops turned instantly. There were three Jews in the passage — confident, young, strong, armed with heavy leather porter's straps, which was a weapon quite as deadly as a knife. They leaned with their backs against the passage wall and gazed through into the room with insolent amusement.

"Simon is my friend," said the Jew. "If it is true you have a letter, I will take it to him. You wait here. But I don't believe you have a letter. You are robbers. Who should send strangers with a letter to Simon at this hour of night?"

Conops explained that to Orwic.

"Tell him he may come with us and satisfy himself," said Orwic, beginning to be piqued at last.

"Which of you has the letter?" the old Jew demanded, and the three young Jews in the passageway advanced into the room, as if they had been signaled.

"I can kill all three of those!" said Conops grimly.

His hand went like lightning to his knife-hilt, but a woman screamed in the gallery and smashed something. Conops and Orwic glanced up, and in the same second each found himself caught in a rawhide noose, arms pinioned.

They fought like roped catamounts with teeth and feet, but the three young Jews were joined by others, who helped to kneel on them and tie them until they could not move, the old Jew sitting all the while, his back against the wall, as if the whole proceeding

were quite usual and did not interest him much.

He said something in a sharp voice, and the men began to search their prisoners.

One of them tossed the purse on to the table. Orwic's short Roman sword followed, then Conops' knife and the bronze badge taken from the gate guard. At last the letter was discovered, tucked under the belt of Orwic's tunic. The old Jew read it, knitting his brows, sitting sidewise so as to hold it toward the light, his lean lips moving as he spelled the words.

"Eh? Tros of Samothrace! Eh?"

He rolled up the letter and thrust it in the bosom of his robe, then spoke rapidly in Aramaic to the Jews who were squatting beside their prisoners. Presently he opened the purse on the table, counted the money, threw it down, called to the woman, who tossed down a cloak from the gallery, and left the house, shuffling along the passage-way in slippers.

## Chapter VIII

### CHLOE — "QUI SALTAVIT PLACUIT"

*For my own sake I give my slaves freedom. Obedience from a free man is not an insult to my manhood. If I punish free men for disobedience and evil manners I offend not my own soul. As for other men's slaves, I judge their owners by the slaves' behavior.*

From the Log of Tros of Samothrace

Tros and Sigurdsen stood over by the water clocks, the full width of the ship from where Chloe and Horatius Verres sat in hiding. But Sigurdsen's voice was a sailor's and, the Gaulish being foreign to him, he spoke it with peculiar emphasis.

"Skram was badly bitten by the dogs," said Sigurdsen. "He saw both men enter the city, and he is afraid

now he will go mad from dog-bite. The other men think Skram will bite them. They talk of killing him for a precaution."

Tros groped in a corner.

"Take this," he commanded. "Tell Skram and all those other fools that the druids gave it to me. It'll sting, mind. You'll have to hold him while you rub it on. Tell Skram that if he drinks nothing but water, and eats no meat for three days, he'll recover and the dogs'll die. Tell him I said that. Then put Skram to bed, choose another in his place, and row back to the shore and wait for Orwic, Conops and the man they'll bring with them."

Sigurdson departed and presently Skram's yells announced the application of the pine-oil dressing to sundry tender parts of his anatomy. Being a skald, he had a strong voice trained to out-yell storms and drunken roistering.

Chloe came out of the dark into the whale-oil lantern light.

"You have sent men ashore?" she asked. "To get in touch with Simon? At this hour of the night? They'll fail! They'll be caught by Balbus' city guards, or be killed by the Jews." She thought a minute. "Better have sent me! Were they slaves?"

"They are friends," Tros answered. "Where did you learn Gaulish?"

She laughed.

"Pkauchios sent me to Gaul one time to dance for Cæsar."

"Why did Pkauchios send you to Cæsar?"

"Pkauchios' business is to know men's secrets. But I failed that time. Cæsar is no fool."

She sat on the bunk again, covering her bare knees with a blanket, and for an hour Tros talked to her, he pacing up and down the cabin floor and she regaling him with all politics of Gades.

"Balbus bleeds the place," she told him. "Balbus pretends to be Cæsar's friend, but he is the nominee of Pompey the Great, who has all Hispania for his

province but stays in Rome and has men like Balbus send him all the money they can squeeze out of their governorships, not that a good percentage doesn't stick to Balbus' fingers. Balbus intends to rebuild the city. If those men you sent ashore get caught by the city guard, they'll find themselves in the quarries sometime to-morrow. Balbus has forbidden the export of male slaves, because he wants to glut the market, so as to buy them cheap for his labor gangs. He sentences all able-bodied vagrants to the quarries. He will crucify you, though, if he catches you, unless —"

"Are there any Roman warships in the harbor?" Tros asked her.

"Only one guard-ship, a trireme, but it's hauled out for repairs. The spring fleet hasn't come yet, and the fleet that wintered here has gone to Gaul with supplies and recruits for Cæsar's army."

"When is the spring fleet expected?"

"Any day. It's overdue. The spring fleet comes with the merchantships to protect them from the pirates. They say the pirates are getting just as bad as they were before Pompey the Great made war on them; and they say, too, that Pompey is too lazy to go after them again, or else afraid that Cæsar's friends might take advantage of his absence. You know, Pompey and Cæsar pretend to be great friends, but they're really deadly enemies, and now that Crassus, the richest man in the world, has gone to Syria, people are saying it's only a matter of time before Cæsar and Pompey are at each other's throats. Until now they've both been afraid of Crassus' money bags, which seems silly to me. The winner could kill Crassus —"

"And which side does Balbus take?"

The girl laughed.

"Balbus takes his own side, just like all the rest of us. *Balbus aedificabit*.<sup>\*</sup> He hopes to win fame by making Gades a great city. If Cæsar should win in the struggle that everybody knows is coming, well — Bal-

<sup>\*</sup> Balbus intends to build.

bus is Cæsar's friend. If Pompey wins, Balbus is Pompey's nominee and very faithful to him."

"What about you?" Tros asked her.

"What do I matter? I am a dancing girl, a slave — the property of Pkauchios the Egyptian."

"Which way lie your sympathies?" Tros insisted.

"With me, of course, with Chloe. But Balbus loves me, if that is what you mean. He would buy me, if I weren't so terribly expensive. And he would find some way of freeing me from Pkauchios, if Pkauchios weren't so useful to him."

"How?"

"Pkauchios reads the stars, and prophesies. Quite a lot of what he says comes true."

"Sorcery, eh?"

"Call it that if you like. Pkauchios owns other dancing girls besides me. We are all of us rather well trained at picking up information."

"You say you know Cæsar. You like him?"

"Who could help it? He's handsome, intelligent — oh, how I hate fools! — he has manners, fascination, courtesy. He can be cruel, he can be magnanimous, he thrills you with his presence, he's extravagant — as reckless as a god with his rewards. Oh, he's wonderful! There isn't any meanness in him, and when he looks at you, you simply feel his power. You can't help answering his questions. And then he just looks away — like this."

Chloe broke into a song that had become current wherever women followed in the wake of Roman arms:

If my love loves not me,  
May a bear from the mountains hug him.

"So now you love Balbus instead?" Tros suggested.

"Bah! Thirty thousand Balbuses are not worth half of Cæsar! I said, Balbus loves *me*. But he is too mean to buy me. What are two hundred thousand



sesterces to a man who can tax all Gades and sell judgments and confiscate traitors' property? I myself own more than two hundred thousand sesterces."

"Then why don't you buy your own freedom?"

"Two good reasons. One is, that I placed my peculium \* in Simon, the Jew's hands, out of the reach of Pkauchios. And Simon can't repay me at the moment, though he's honest in money matters like most of the rich Jews. The other is, that if I buy my freedom, I should still be Pkauchios' client. I couldn't leave Gades without his permission."

"And —?"

Tros felt himself on the scent of something. He experienced that strange thrill, unexplainable, that precedes a discovery. He shot questions at random.

"Why didn't you deposit your money with the temple priests, as most slaves do?"

"Because the priests hate Pkauchios. They would rob me to spite him. Simon is more honest."

Possibly she felt in Tros something like that same compelling force that she said had made her answer Cæsar's questions. After a moment's pause she answered:

"I didn't want my freedom until —" she glanced at the dark corner where Horatius Verres sat in silence — "you see, I have more liberty without it. As a slave, there are few things I can't do in Gades."

"But —?" Tros insisted.

She shuddered.

"Roman law! If my master should be charged with treason they would have to take my evidence under torture. No escape from that. A slave's evidence against her master mayn't be taken any other way. Some of them die under torture. None of them are much good afterwards. They're always lame, and the fire leaves scars."

\* The private fortune of a slave. Many masters encouraged slaves to purchase their own freedom, since then the master received a high price and retained a valuable "client" who was still bound to him by various restrictions.

Tros whistled softly to himself, pacing the cabin floor, his hands behind him. Suddenly he turned on her.

"You didn't come here just for Horatius Verres' sake! You didn't cross that marshland in the dark for the fun of a swim to a pirate's ship! You called me a pirate just now. You had Verres' word for that. Whose else?"

"Cæsar wrote to Balbus to be on the watch for you. I saw the letter. It came by the overland mail three weeks ago."

"You a slave, and you risk yourself on a pirate's ship?"

"Well, I thought I would make friends with you."

"Why?"

"Because if Pkauchios gets into difficulties, I might be able to escape to somewhere. Almost anywhere would do."

Tros, pacing the floor again, turned that over in his mind, reflecting that if she was willing to risk herself in what she supposed were a pirate's hands, she must be in serious danger of the Roman tortures. Pkauchios, her master, must be well into the toils. However, he was not quite sure yet that she was telling the truth.

"You say Balbus loves you and would torture you?" he asked. "He is the governor, isn't he? He can overrule the court. He would find some excuse —"

"Bah!" she interrupted. "Balbus would enjoy it! You should see him at the circus. He isn't satisfied unless a dozen horses break their legs under the chariot wheels. See him at the spectacles. He likes the agony prolonged. A month ago he had a woman scourged and then worried by dogs, but he gave her a stick to defend herself and it took the brutes an hour to kill her. Balbus pretends he does it for the people's sake, but he makes them sick. It is he who likes it!"

Tros grinned pleasantly. The girl was trembling,

trying to conceal it. He perceived he might make use of her, but fear, and the more of it the better, though a safe spur, would not provide against her treachery. He must supply hope, practical and definite. However, first another question, to make sure he was not wasting time and wit:

“So, after all, you have no real influence with Balbus?”

“That I have! I say, he loves me! I whisper, and he favors this or that one. But he would get just as much pleasure out of seeing me tortured as he does out of hiring me from Pkauchios to dance before his guests. He would say to the world, ‘See how just I am. Behold my impartiality. I torture even Chloe, *qui saltavit, placuit*.’\* Then he would enjoy my writhings! He would enjoy them all the more because he loves me.”

Tros stood staring at her, arms akimbo.

“Do you think, at a word from you, Balbus would admit me into Gades?” he asked.

“That would come better from Pkauchios. Pkauchios can go to him any hour and say he has read portents in the stars,” she answered.

“Can you manage Pkauchios?”

She frowned, then nodded.

“Yes. But he is dangerous. He will try to put you to his own use.” Suddenly she laughed. “Let Pkauchios go to Balbus and prophesy that Tros the Samothracian will enter the harbor at dawn in his great red ship. It is red, isn’t it? So Cæsar’s letter said.”

“Vermilion, with purple sails!” Tros answered proudly.

“And let Pkauchios say to Balbus that Tros of Samothrace is destined to render him a very great service. At dawn, the first prophecy will come true. So Balbus will believe the second and will receive you eagerly.”

\* ‘Who danced and pleased.’ These famous words were a motto on a Roman dancer’s tombstone.

Tros nodded. He well knew the Romans' superstitious reverence for signs and omens. But he also knew the notorious treachery of the dancing girls of Gades.

"Do you care for pearls?" he asked her.

She gasped as he took a big one from the pocket in his belt and placed it on the palm of her extended hand.

"You shall have enough of those," he said, "to make a necklace."

"But a slave mayn't wear them."\*

"You shall buy your freedom from your master."

"But Simon can't give me my money!"

"If all plans fail, you shall escape with me on my ship — you and Horatius Verres."

"If?" she said, watching him, weighing the pearl in the palm of her hand.

"If you give to me in full, meanwhile, your influence in Gades! If you work for me ten times as faithfully as you have ever served your master! If you fail me in nothing, and lend me all your wit and all your knowledge."

"A bargain!" she exclaimed and held the pearl between her lips a moment. Then, suddenly, "Show me the rest of them! How many pearls?"

"You shall have them at the right time. Their number will depend on you." Tros stepped to the door. He heard the oar-thumps of the longboat. "How will you go back?"

"I will swim."

He shook his head. "I will send you ashore. Say nothing to the men. But how will you reach the city? There will be no Horatius Verres this time to fight the dogs off and protect you."

"I told you I am a slave who owns slaves. I have two men waiting for me on the beach."

Tros heard the deck-watch challenge and Sigurdson's answering howl from close at hand.

\* The Roman law was very strict as to who might wear pearls.

"There is time yet," he said, glancing at the water clock. "Hide there." He pointed to the dark corner where Horatius Verres sat. "If this is Simon coming, don't let him see you. Slip out when he enters the cabin and I will order my boatmen to row you to the beach."

Then he peered at Verres. He could hardly see his outline in the shadow under the row of clothing.

"You," he said, "stay where you are, and don't let me hear a sound from you!"

## Chapter IX

### HEROD BEN MORDECAI

*They think they know a thing because they have a familiar word for it. If I say avarice, they think of a craving to have. But do they know the subtle treachery of avarice? It is incapable of honor. But who knows it? Not the avaricious!*

*Am I over-sudden? Should I threaten? A threat is the snarl of cowardice. A fair warning is no threat, but is treachery entitled to a warning?*

*A fair warning is an appeal to wisdom, as when the clouds warn mariners to furl their sails. Threats are the lies of a coward masking treachery. I smite hard where the threat squeaks. Let the blow be a warning to liars to mend their manners.*

From the Log of Tros of Samothrace

Tros went to the deck and peered over the bulwark into darkness. There was a half-moon now, but the ship's shadow covered the longboat and he could only vaguely see the shapes of four men sitting in the stern, one of whom was hugely fat, unquestionably Simon.

Sigurdson climbed to the deck and grumbled, using Norse oaths:



"Helpless! Weighs like six men! Have to hoist him!"

"Orwic? Conops?"

"Haven't seen them. Fat man rode horseback to the beach. Asked for you. Others are his servants."

Sigurdson ordered a rope rove through a block on the after yardarm and a bight put in the end of it. Tros leaned overside.

"Simon!" he called. "Simon ben Tobias?"

A hoarse voice answered. Question and answer followed in a mixture of three languages, but Tros could hardly hear what Simon said.

"Ho there!" he exploded. "Put a parceling on that rope? Will you cut good Simon's rump in halves? Now steady. That's a nobleman of Gades, not a sack of corn!"

They walked the grunting weight up to the bulwark rail and swung him inboard, where Tros received him in strong arms.

*"Simon, salaam! Salaam aleikum. Marhaba fik!"*

"Peace? Blessing? There is none in Gades!" Simon answered, wheezing with fatness and asthma. "Curses on this night air. There is death in it! Tros, Tros, I can not pay the debt I owe you!"

Tros hurried him into the cabin, a slave, who had clambered up the ship's side, fussily arranging shawls around the old Jew's shoulders. A second slave helped a lean man up over the bulwark, who followed in uninvited.

"Door — d`oor — shut the door!" Simon gasped in Greek, the language he had grown more used to than his native tongue.

The two slaves slammed it and remained outside. Tros helped Simon into a chair beside the table and then turned to face the second man, an old Jew in a cloak and a dirty cloth cap, beneath which long black ringlets curled beside his eyes.

"Who is this?"

Simon, coughing apologetically, answered —

"Herod ben Mordecai."

It might have been the cough, but it appeared to Tros he did not like the name.

"A friend?"

Simon did not answer — only coughed again, his tongue between his teeth.

Herod ben Mordecai smiled, his lower lip protruding as he thrust his head and shoulders forward to peer into Tros's face.

"Let us hope we are three friends!" he said significantly. "Shall I sit on that chair or on this one?"

He began to peer about the cabin, his bright eyes appraising everything. Tros sat down on his own oak chair with his back to the stern of the ship and Simon on his right. Herod ben Mordecai helped himself to the third chair, facing Simon, with his back toward the corner in which Chloe and Horatius Verres crouched in hiding.

"Where are the Lord Orwic and the man I sent with him?" Tros asked, looking straight at Simon.

Simon's face, majestic, heavy-browed and framed in a patriarchal beard, but sallow now from ill-health, wrinkled into a worried frown. Old before his time and physically weak from being too much waited on, he looked too strong-willed to yield to death and yet unable to enjoy the life he clung to. His clothes were wholly oriental, of embroidered camel hair, and there were far too many of them, making him look even fatter than he was. An eastern headdress, bound on with a jeweled forehead band, concealed his baldness and increased his dignity; and he wore heavily jeweled rings on three of the fingers of each of his fat hands. He had kicked off his sandals when he entered and his fat feet, stockinged in white wool, were tucked up under him and hidden by the bulge of his prodigious stomach.

"I haven't seen them!" he said hoarsely.

"Then how did you get my letter?" Tros asked.

"Herod ben Mordecai brought it."

Tros stared at Herod. The old Jew's brilliant eyes met his without a quiver.

"How did you obtain my letter?" he demanded.

"My friend," Herod answered in an unexpectedly firm, business-like voice, "you are lucky it fell into my hands. I took it straight to Simon, who keeps his house like a castle. There are not so many who could get to Simon at such an hour and, believe me or not, there are fewer who would not have gone straight to the Romans with the news that Tros of Samothrace is so near Gades!"

"I asked you, how did you get the letter?" Tros insisted.

"I heard you. I didn't answer," said the Jew.

"Very well," said Tros, "you are my prisoner!"

He made no move. He simply kicked his scabbard to throw the sword-hilt forward, and sat still. The Jew looked keenly at him, thrusting out his lower lip again, and for a minute there was silence, only disturbed by Simon's heavy breathing. Then Herod leaned across the table toward Tros, thrusting forward one hand, fingers twitching.

"You should make a friend of me," he said excitedly, "for Simon's sake. Let Simon tell it."

Herod resettled himself, twitching at his curled black beard and showing yellow teeth. Simon sighed heavily.

"Tros!" he gasped suddenly. "Herod knows too much!"

"What a prisoner knows won't sink the ship!" Tros answered.

Herod leaned forward again, elbows on the table, lower lip protruding, eyes as hard and glittering as jet.

"But it will ruin Simon," he retorted in a level voice.

Simon blurted out the facts, a list of them, while Herod tapped a finger on the table as if keeping check.

"I am in debt. Caius Julius Cæsar owes me three million sesterces, and won't pay. Balbus owes me a million, and I daren't ask him for it. If a word

gets out in Gades against my credit, there will be a run on me. I lent my warehouse to conspirators for —”

Tros whistled softly.

“Which faction now?” he asked.

“*Oi-yoi!* Gades is full of factions!” Herod remarked, rubbing his hands as if washing them. He seemed amused.

“— for the storage of weapons,” Simon went on. “They paid well. I needed — I need money. I didn’t know those bales of merchandise were weapons until Herod spied on me and came and told me. Now, if Balbus learns of it, he will jump at the chance to seize my goods. He will tear up his own promises to pay. Cæsar’s too for the sake of Cæsar’s favor — and crucify me!”

“On a great — big — tree!” said Herod, laying both hands on his knees and smiling cruelly. “You would better tell Simon why you sent for him and make your proposal, whatever it is, and let us all three consider it. I am a man of business. Offer me business or my young men will be at Balbus’ door at dawn. Before he has bathed himself he will have sent his guards to Simon’s warehouse, where they will find the weapons in bales and bags and barrels. Then a thousand slaves that Simon owns and his great house full of curios and his daughters’ children — how many, Simon? How many daughters’ children? — will all be sold. And Simon, well — he may escape on this ship. I don’t know. But the two who went ashore to-night will remain in Gades, where they will suffer such tortures as only Balbus can imagine — rack, fire, spikes under the nails —”

“Tros!” Simon exclaimed wheezily, his nervousness increasing the effect of asthma. “We are old friends! You will not —”

“None knows what I won’t do!” Tros interrupted, thumping his great fist down on the table. “My young friend Orwic and my servant Conops went ashore. If a hair of a head of either one is injured, this man” — he scowled and showed his teeth at Herod — “dies!”

"What if I don't know where they are?" said Herod, shrugging his shoulders impudently.

"So much the worse for you!"

"You heard me. Balbus will ruin Simon!" Herod insisted, thrusting out his lower lip again.

"We will cross the bridge of Simon when we reach it," Tros said grimly.

Herod showed anxiety at last. His eyes admitted he had overstepped his reach, grew shifty, glanced from one man to the other, rested at last on Tros's angry face.

"You're a fine friend, to talk of letting your friend Simon be sold up and crucified just for the sake of a Gaul and a Greek slave! Mind you, I can't stop it, not unless I go ashore. My young men know I went to Simon's house. They don't trust him — nah, nah! They don't trust him. They know what to do! Any of Simon's slaves might murder me, mightn't they? Any time. Dead men can't talk. So you see, if I don't return pretty soon from Simon's house, my young men will go straight to Balbus. I tell you, I can't stop it unless —"

"I'll drown you unless my men return!" Tros interrupted. "You may send a messenger ashore —"

"I'll go!" said Chloe's voice, and even Tros was startled. Simon nearly screamed.

She stepped out from the dark and Simon stared uncomfortably at her, looked like a man caught naked in the bath for all that he wore so many clothes and she so few. Herod ben Mordecai recovered from surprise and found speech first. He became all oily smiles, a mass of them, his very body writhed itself into a smile, and his lower lip grew pendulous like an elephant's.

"Ah, pretty Chloe! Clever Chloe! Who'd have thought of finding Chloe on the ship of Tros of Samothrace! Chloe and I are old friends, aren't we! Often I hired Chloe before she got so famous and so expensive. Many a stroke of business Chloe had a hand in, eh, Chloe? Yeh-yeh. Chloe could tell who



taught her how to turn a pretty profit now and then, eh, Chloe? Friendship, eh!"

He chuckled, as if remembering old mischief she and he had shared in, dug her in the ribs with his long forefinger, caught the edge of her damp chlamys, trying to pull her closer to him. She broke away, approached Simon from behind and stroked his forehead with her cool hands.

"Poor Simon!" she said merrily. "And he owes me two hundred thousand sesterces! Am I to lose it, Simon? And you so old! You'll never have time to go grow rich again before you die, unless we help you! How shall we do it?"

Tros seemed to know. He reached for pen and ink and set them down in front of Herod. Then he clipped a scrap of parchment from a roll.

"Write!" he commanded. "To the people you refer to as your young men. Bid them release to Chloe, the slave of Pkauchios, my two men from whom you took that letter. Add that secret business will detain you. They are not to be troubled on your account. They are not to go to Balbus."

Herod ben Mordecai shrugged up his shoulders almost to his ears, then shook his head.

"I won't!" he said. "Sometimes letters get into the wrong hands. And besides, I can't — I can't write."

Chloe chuckled. Tros reached into a locker behind his chair, chose a long knife, stuck it point first in the table, bent it back toward him and released it suddenly.

"You have until that stops quivering!" he remarked.

Herod began to write with great facility, using Aramaic characters. He covered both sides of the scrap of parchment and then signed his name. Tros scrutinized the writing carefully, then handed it to Simon for a second censorship before intrusting it to Chloe.

"There, you see, there. I have done exactly what you say," said Herod. "I was only bargaining. We all have our own way of bargaining. You had the better

of it. Now let's be friendly. I wouldn't have hurt Simon for —"

He wilted into silence under Tros's stare. He looked puzzled — seemed to wonder what mistake he might have made in judging character. Tros turned to Chloe.

"Understand me now, my two friends first! Go bring them here."

"Too late!" said Chloe. "I will have to hide them. Remember, I must go to Pkauchios and send him hurrying to Balbus with a reading of the stars!"

Tros nodded, chose a pearl out of the pocket in his belt, held it for a moment between thumb and finger in the lantern light, and tucked it away again. None but he and Chloe was aware of that sideplay.

"I want an interview with Balbus. Do you think your master could persuade him to come to my ship?"

Chloe shook her head violently.

"There have been too many plots against his life of late," she answered. "In some ways he is careless, in others he is like an old fox for caution. If you were an informer, if you had some tale to tell him about new conspiracies —"

Tros grinned. She had touched his genius. His hero was the great Odysseus. He knew the Odyssey by heart. He could make up a tale on the spur of a moment to meet almost any contingency.

"Tell Balbus I bring him opportunity to be a greater man than Cæsar!" he said confidently. "Bid your master tell Balbus to trust me, that he may stand in Cæsar's shoes."

She smiled, stared, smiled at him, her eyes astonished.

"Are you a seer?" she asked. "Those lion's eyes of yours — I — I —"

"Go do my bidding!"

He had aroused her superstition. If superstition might assist the pearls to bind her in his service, he could play that game as well as any man.

He rose from his chair and took Herod ben Mordecai

by the neck. The Jew clutched at his wrists and tried to struggle. Tros shook the senses nearly out of him and dragged him out on deck, where he called a Northman.

"Fasten this man in an empty water-cask." Then suddenly he thought of Horatius Verres and turned to Chloe. "Fetch your Roman."

She led out Horatius Verres by the hand. They looked like handsome children in the darkness.

"Verres," said Tros, "you may earn my favor. Go below. Stand guard over this Jew. See he doesn't escape from the cask and that none has word with him."

There was a smile on Verres' face as he followed the Northman. The fellow had the Roman military habit of obedience without remark. Tros decided he liked him. He turned to Sigurdsen.

"Put this woman ashore. Nay," he said, taking his cloak from her, "that stays here! You may have a blanket." He returned to the cabin, took a blanket from his bunk and threw it over her. "Now, I will be in Gades harbor with the morning tide, ready for action. If Balbus is friendly, be you on the beach. If you are not there, I will send a threat to Balbus that unless the Lord Orwic and my man Conops are on board by noon, unharmed, I will burn all Roman shipping. I make no threats that I will not fulfil. For you, in that case, there will be no pearls, no freedom, no Horatius Verres, for I will sail away with him! So use brains and be swift."

Chloe went overside like a trained athlete, hardly touching the rope-ladder that Sigurdsen hung carefully in place. Tros watched the boat until it vanished in gloom at the edge of the path of moonlight, then returned to Simon in the cabin.

"Simon, old friend," he said, sitting down beside him, "in the fires of friendship men learn what they are and are not. I have learned this night that you are not so rich as I believed, nor yet so bold as you pretended. No, nor yet so wise as your repute. Tell me

more of this Herod ben Mordecai."

Simon drooped his massive head in the humility of an oriental who acknowledges the justice of rebuke, and was silent for as long as sixty labored breaths. Then, wheezing, he revealed the sharp horns of his own dilemma.

"Tros, that Herod is a professional informer. Now he acts spy for the tax-gatherers, now he betrays a conspiracy, now he plays pander to Balbus. Now he buys debts and enforces payment. Now he lays charges of treason, so that he may buy men's confiscated valuables at the price of trash. And he has found out what is true — that there are weapons in my warehouse!"

Tros thought for a minute, drumming with his fingers on the table.

"Simon," he said at last, "you are not such a fool as to have let that happen without your knowledge."

In silence Simon let the accusation go for granted. He stared at the table, avoiding Tros's eyes.

"Tros," he said presently, hoarsely, "I am a Jew. I am not like these Romans who open their veins or stab themselves when their sins have found them out. Yet mine have found out me. I let myself be called the friend of Pkauchios, that cursed, black-souled dog of an Egyptian, a sorcerer! *Hey-yeh-yarrh!* It is the fault of all my race that we forever trust the magicians! We forsake the God of our forefathers. Too late, we find ourselves forsaken. *Adonai!* I am undone!"

"But I not!" Tros retorted. "I am not a Jew, so your god has no quarrel with me. Tell me more concerning Pkauchios."

"He has a hold on Balbus, through his sorceries. He knows that Balbus owes me a million sesterces. He knows I need the money. He knows Balbus would like to indict me for something or other in order to confiscate my wealth, such as it is — such as it is. I have a thousand slaves I can't sell, some millions I can't collect! Pkauchios plans an insurrection by the Spaniards, who will listen to any one because they

groan under the Roman tyranny. But forever they plot, do nothing and then accuse one another. I would have nothing to do with it. But Pkauchios knew of nowhere, except in my great warehouse, to conceal his weapons from the Roman spies. He offered me a price — a big, a very big price for the accommodation. And he threatened, if I should refuse, to whisper a false charge against me.”

“And you were weak enough to yield to that?” Tros asked him, wondering.

“I grow old. I needed money. Tros, I have sent much money to Jerusalem for the rebuilding of the Temple. *Aie-yaie*, but will it ever be rebuilt!\* Pkauchios swore that when Balbus is slain his debt to me shall be paid at once out of the treasury. I let him use my warehouse. And then Herod’s spies! *Ach-h-h!* Herod came to me to-night with your letter in his hand. He would not say where or how he had obtained it. He said, ‘What does Tros of Samothrace require of you? Tros is a pirate, proscribed by Cæsar, as all know. There is a reward of three talents set on the head of Tros of Samothrace.’ He offered to share the reward with me — two for him and one for me. He said, ‘Let us tempt this fellow Tros ashore with promises. Let us tempt him into your house, Simon, and then send for Balbus.’ And he made threats. He said, ‘Balbus would be interested to learn where those weapons are hidden in barrels and bales and boxes!’ So I came with him, bribing the guard at the gate. And Tros, I don’t know what to say or what to do!”

Simon bowed his head until it nearly touched the table, then rocked to and fro until the strong oak chair groaned under him. Tros closed his eyes in thought, and for a moment it appeared to him the cabin was repeopled. There were Fflur, Caswallon and the druid, bidding him good-by. He could see Fflur’s gray eyes. He could hear her voice — “Be bold, Lord Tros!” And then the druid — “In the midst of danger thou shalt

\* It was rebuilt several years later by Herod the Great.



find the keys of safety!"

Tros leaned and patted Simon on the shoulder.

"What of Chloe?"

"A slave. A Gades dancing girl," said Simon as if that was the worst that could be said of any one. "From earliest infancy they are trained in treachery as well as dancing. That one has been trained by Pkauchios, than whom there is no more black-souled devil out of hell! None in his senses trusts the dancing girls of Gades. Balbus, so they say, trusts Chloe. He is mad — as mad as I was when I trusted him and Cæsar with my money! *Uh — uh!* Trust no dancing girl."

"She seems to have trusted you with her money," Tros remarked.

"Aye, and shame is on me. I took her money at interest, even as I took yours. I can not repay her."

"But I think you shall!" said Tros, and shut his eyes again to think. "You shall repay her and you shall repay me."

For a while there was silence, pulsed by Simon's heavy breathing and the lapping of light waves against the ship's hull.

"Simon!" Tros said at last. "I need the keys of Rome!"

"God knows I haven't them!" said Simon. "Until Crassus went to Syria I had a good, rich, powerful friend in Rome, but now no longer."

"But you have influence with Balbus since he owes you so much money?"

"Influence?" said Simon, sneering. "He invites me to his banquets, to over-eat and over-drink and watch the naked-bellied women dance. But I asked a favor only yesterday — only a little favor — leave to export a few hundred slaves to Rome. If they had been women he would have said yes, but he has placed an embargo on male slaves, to depress the local market so as to have cheap labor to rebuild Gades. He knows I have no female slaves, so it was no use lying to him. He answered, he would give permission gladly, only that Tros of Samothrace, the pirate proscribed by

Cæsar, is at sea and might capture the whole consignment, for which he, Balbus, would be blamed. Bah! So much for my influence! He let Euripides, the Greek, export a hundred women only last week, and that was since Cæsar's letter came. Pirates! What he fears is a rising market! He knows I need money. He knows I have a thousand Lusitanii that I bought for export. At his suggestion, too. I bought them at his suggestion! Tros, it costs money to feed a thousand slaves! That dog Balbus waits and smiles and speaks me fair and watches for the day when I must sell those slaves at auction, so that he may buy them dirt cheap for his labor gangs!"

"But you stand well with Cæsar," Tros suggested. "You say Cæsar owes you three million —"

"*Phagh!*" Simon's face grew apoplectically purple. "Cæsar is the greatest robber of them all!"

"But he has brains," Tros retorted. "Caius Julius Cæsar knows it is wiser to keep an old friend than to be forever hunting new ones. Why did you lend him the money?"

"Because his creditors were after him and he promised me his influence. Of what use to me now in Gades is Cæsar's influence in Gaul? Tell me that! I wrote to him for my money, for a little something on account. No answer! I suppose a secretary read the letter. *Tschch!* With Cæsar it is face to face that counts. Nothing matters to him then but the impression he makes on bystanders. Vain! He thinks himself a god! He acts a drama, with himself the hero of it. Approach him, flatter him, ask for what he owes you in the presence of a dozen people and he will pay if it takes the last coin in his treasury. Pay if he has to capture and sell sixty thousand slaves to reimburse himself! That was how he repaid Crassus. Sixty thousand Gauls he sold in one year! *Tschah!* With a smile he will pay, if he has an audience. With a smile and a gesture that calls attention to his magnanimity and modesty and sense of justice! But a letter, opened by his secretary, read to him, perhaps, in a

tent at night, when his steward has told him of a nice, young, pretty matron washed and combed and waiting to be brought to him — *Tshay-yeh-yeh!* None but a Jew, but a Jew — would have let him have three million sesterces!”

Tros tried to appear sympathetic. He leaned out of his chair and patted Simon on the shoulder. But the news of Simon's difficulties only strengthened his own confidence. When he was sure that Simon was not looking, he permitted a grēat grin to spread over his face.

No Roman warships in the harbor, conspiracies ashore, Simon's warehouse full of weapons, between decks two hundred and fifty first-class fighting men, demanding shore leave and agreeable to act the role of slaves for the occasion, Balbus the Roman governor ambitious, greedy, superstitious and in the toils of an Egyptian sorcerer whose slave, Chloe, a favorite of Balbus, was in a mood to betray her master — it would be strange, it would be incredible, if the gods could not evolve out of all that mixed material an opportunity for Tros of Samothrace to use his wits!

“Simon,” he said. “Once you did my father a good turn in Alexandria. You did it without bargaining, without a price. I am my father's son. So I will help you, Simon. You shall pay your debts —”

“God send it!” Simon muttered.

“You shall be spared the shame of not repaying Chloe —”

“*S-s-sheh-eh!*” Simon drew in his breath as if something had stabbed him.

“We will both of us have our will of Balbus —”

“*Uh-uh!* He is all powerful in Gades. If they kill him, there will only be a worse one in his place!”

“You shall have your sesterces, and I, the key to Rome!”

“God send it! *Eh*, God send it!” Simon answered hopelessly. “But I think we shall all be crucified!”

“Not we!” Tros answered. “I have crucified a plan, that's all. A plan that can't be changed is like a fetter on a man's foot.”

He arose and kicked out right and left by way of illustration that his brain was free to make the most of its opportunity.

## Chapter X

### THE COTTAGE IN PKAUCHIOS' GARDEN

*If a man insults my dignity by seeking to make me the tool of treachery, let him look to his guard. For if he need it not, that shall be because I lack the skill to turn his treason on himself.*

From the Log of Tros of Samothrace

Orwic and Conops lay flat on a tiled floor with leather thongs biting their wrists and ankles. The only sound was the quiet breathing of the Jews who squatted with their backs against the wall. Thought was tense, speculative, almost audible, but Conops was the first to speak in a whisper to Orwic:

“Roll toward me. I can move my fingers. Maybe I can untie you —”

A Jew leaned through the dark and struck him on the mouth with the end of a leather strap. After that there was silence again — so still that the rats came and the slow drip-drip of water somewhere up behind the gallery began to sound like hammer blows on an anvil.

After an interminable time the Jews began to talk in muttered undertones. Then a woman brought food to them. There was a reek of pickled fish and onions that they guzzled in the dark. Orwic took advantage of the noise to try to chafe the thongs that bound his wrists, rubbing them against the floor tiles. But a Jew heard the movement and struck him. After that there was silence again, until one of the Jews fell asleep and snored.

There was no way of judging the time, but no light

shone yet through the shutter-clinks when a furious knocking began at the street door. It boomed hollow through the house and brought the Jews to their feet, whispering to each other. One of them leaned over Orwic to examine his thongs and another kicked Conops in the ribs by way of warning to be still. A woman leaned over the gallery and whispered excitedly. One of the Jews went out into the passage, lighted a lantern after a dozen nervous fumbles with the flint and steel and shouted angrily, but Conops, who knew many languages could not understand a word he said.

The knocking continued and grew louder, until the Jew with the lantern began talking to some one through a hole in the street door. He was answered by a woman's voice in Greek. She seemed to have no care for secrecy and Conops could hear her without the slightest effort.

"I say, admit me! Keep me waiting and I'll call the Romans! I tell you, I have a letter from Herod ben Mordecai! Open!"

The door opened. Several people entered. There was excited conversation in the passage. Up in the gallery the unseen Jewess fluttered like a frightened hen. The wooden railing creaked as she leaned over it to listen. Then the girl's voice in the passage again, loud and confident, speaking Greek:

"No use telling me lies! I know they're here! You've read Herod's letter, so out of my way!"

"Give me the letter then!"

"No!"

A scuffle, and then a girl in a damp Greek chlamys, with a thick blue blanket over that — and it surely never came from Hispania — stood in the doorway, holding the Jew's lantern. Over her shoulders two male Numidian slaves peered curiously.

"So there they are! Untie them! If they're hurt, I'll speak to Balbus and have him crucify the lot of you!"

Conops cried out to her in Greek:



"Get me my knife, mistress! Then no need to crucify them!"

She laughed.

"I am Chloe," she said. "I came from —"

Suddenly she checked herself, remembering the Jews were listening..

"You will do exactly what I say!" she went on. "No fighting! They shall give you back everything they have taken from you. Then come with me."

She looked like a princess to Orwic, although the blanket puzzled him. It did not for a second occur to him that she might be some one's slave, although her sandals were covered with filth from the barren land outside the city and he might have known no woman of position would have walked at that hour of the night. Had she not slaves of her own, who obeyed her orders? Did the Jews not slink away from her like whipped curs? Was her manner not royal, bold, authoritative?

Her Numidians took the weapons off the table — they had none of their own — and cut the thongs that bound wrists and feet.

"Now count your money!" she said, pointing at the purse. So Conops shook out the money on the table.

"Ten gold coins missing!" he remarked, chafing his wrists, rubbing one ankle against the other. If he might not use his knife, he was determined that the Jews should pay in some way for the privilege of having put him and Orwic to indignity. Instantly he wished he had said twenty gold coins.

The woman in the gallery began to scream imprecations in a mixture of Greek, Aramaic and the local dialect, which itself was a blend of two or three tongues. Chloe silenced her with a threat to call the city guards.

"Who will take more than ten gold-pieces," she remarked, "if I tell them I have authority from Balbus."

After a few moments, still noisily protesting, the woman threw ten coins down to the floor, one by

one, and Conops gathered them, well paid for a night's imprisonment, but grinning at himself because he had not been smarter. Chloe took Orwic's hand and smiled to him, chafing his wrist between her palms.

"Are you ready? Will you come with me?" she asked engagingly in Gaulish.

Orwic would have gone with any one just then. To go with Chloe, after lying in that smelly room with hands and feet tied, was such incredibly good fortune that he almost rubbed his eyes to find out whether he were dreaming. When she let go his hand he took his Roman sword from one of the Numidians and followed her into the passage; there he drew it to guard her back against the Jews, his head full of all sorts of flaming chivalry. She turned and whispered to him, raising her arms to draw his head close which, if he had thought of it, a princess hardly would have done on such scant acquaintance.

"You must walk through the streets with an arm around me," she said, using the Gaulish with a funny, foreign accent that thrilled him almost as much as her breath in his ear. "You must look like a Roman nobleman who has seduced a girl and takes her home with him. We must walk swiftly and then none will interfere with us."

She rearranged the blanket, throwing one end of it over her head, as a girl ashamed of prying eyes might do, and led the way into the street where she shrank, as if she needed the protection, into Orwic's left arm, under his pallium.

"To the left!" she said. "Forward! Quickly!"

The Jews' door slammed behind them, and the procession at once became perfectly regular. Conops understood the game now. He walked in front, just close enough for Chloe to call directions to him, his long knife tapping on the scabbard as a warning to all and sundry to keep their distance. The two Numidians brought up the rear, striding as if they were owned by Balbus himself. Being slaves of a slave,

they were much more harmless than they looked.

Orwic's Celtic diffidence prevented him from speaking. He was not exactly shy. He was ashamed of having failed Tros and of having to be rescued by a woman, half inclined to think the gods had personally had a hand in it, so sudden and mysterious the rescue had been, and not a little bewildered, besides thrilled. He hurried along in silence for ten minutes through a maze of winding alleys, thinking furiously before Chloe volunteered some information.

"I sent my two women to Pkauchios to warn him to be up and ready for us."

But ignorant of who Pkauchios might be, Orwic simply turned that over in his mind. Developments seemed more mysterious than ever. Chloe went on talking:

"Pkauchios may try to scare you with his magic, but remember what I tell you: his magic is all humbug. He gets most of his secret information from us girls."

"Us girls" did not sound like the words a princess would have used. Orwic's wits were returning.

"Who are you?" he asked, looking down at her, pulling aside a corner of the blanket so as to see her face. It was very dark; he had to bend his head, and at a street corner a drunken Roman stopped his litter to laugh raucously.

"Ho there, Licurgus Quintus!" he roared. "I recognize you! Where did you find that pretty piece you have under your pallium? Mark me, I'll tell Livia! I'll tell them all about it at the baths to-morrow! Ha-ha-hah! Licurgus Quintus walking, and a girl under his pallium at this hour of the night. Ha-ha-ha-hah!"

Four slaves bore the litter off into the darkness, with its owner's legs protruding through the panel at the side.

"That drunken fool is Nimius Severus," Chloe remarked. "He offered to buy me last week. Bah! He has nothing but an appetite and debts to feed it with!"

"Who are you?" Orwic asked again.

"Chloe, the slave of Pkauchios of Egypt. I am called the favorite of Gades. Soon you shall see me dance, and you will know why."

"Oh!" said Orwic.

He relapsed into a state of shame again, his very ears red at the thought of having mistaken a slave girl for a princess. Being British, he had totally un-Roman notions about conduct; it was the fact that he had made the mistake, not that she was a slave, that annoyed him. Chloe misinterpreted the change of mood, that was as perceptible as if he had pushed her away from him.

"I expect to be free before long," she remarked.

Suddenly it occurred to Orwic that the best thing he could do would be to head straight for the beach and swim to the ship if there was no longboat waiting.

"Tros — is Tros on the ship?" he demanded.

But Chloe guessed rightly this time, understood that in another second he would be out of her reach, going like wind downhill toward the city gate.

"No," she lied instantly. "Tros is with Pkauchios."

Orwic detected the lie. She realized it.

"Tros came in search of you," she added.

But by that time Orwic did not believe a word she said. It seemed to him he was escaping from one danger to be trapped a second time.

"How did you learn where I was?" he demanded.

"Tros told me."

They had halted and were standing in the moonlight face to face where they could see each other. Her clever eyes read his, and she realized she needed more than words to convince him.

"Tros paid me to come and rescue you," she went on, raising the edge of her chlamys, showing a yard of bare leg as she thrust her fingers into a tiny pocket. "Look, he gave me that to come and rescue you."

She showed him a pearl in the palm of her hand, and it was big enough to convince Orwic that it might

be one of those pearls that the druids had given to Tros. He decided to let her lead him farther but his normal mistrust of women, that Tros had encouraged by every possible means, increased tenfold.

"Though you hate me, you must walk as if you love me!" Chloe remarked, and he had to take her underneath his pallium again.

The stars were bright and it lacked at least an hour of dawn when they emerged into a rather wider street that led between extensive villas set in gardens. Trees leaned over the walls on either hand. Toward the end of the street there was a bronze gate set into a high wall over which a grove of cypresses loomed black against the sky; a panel in that gate slid back the moment Chloe whistled; a dark face eyed her through the hole, and instantly the gate swung wide on silent hinges. There was a sound of splashing fountains and an almost overwhelming scent of flowers. Tiles underfoot, but a shadow cast by the cypresses so deep that it was impossible to see a pace ahead.

Fifty yards away among the trees were lights that appeared to emerge between chinks of a shutter, but Chloe took Orwic's hand and led him in a different direction, through a shadowy maze of shrubs that murmured in the slight sea breeze, until they reached a cottage built of marble, before whose door a lantern hung from a curved bronze bracket.

Two Greek girls came to the door and greeted Chloe deferentially. One of them behaved toward Conops as if he were a handsome Roman officer instead of the ugliest one-eyed, horny-handed Levantine sailor she had ever set eyes on. The Numidian slaves found weapons somewhere — took their stand outside the door on either side of it, with great curved swords unsheathed. Chloe nodded to them as she led the way in.

Orwic followed her because there was light inside and the place did not look like a trap or a prison, although the small, square windows were heavily barred. There was a fairly large room, beautifully



furnished in a style so strange to his British notions that he felt again as if Chloe must be at least a princess. By the British firesides minstrels had always sung of princes and princesses in disguise who rescued people out of foul dungeons and conveyed them to bowers of beauty, where they married and lived happy ever after; and it is what the child is taught that the grown man thinks of first in strange surroundings. True, British slaves were very often treated like the members of a family, but he had never heard of a slave-girl living in such luxury as this.

There was a second room curtained off from the first, and into that Chloe vanished, through curtains of glittering beads that jingled musically. One woman followed, and there were voices, laughter, splashing. Almost before Orwic had had time to let the other woman, on her knees before him, clean his sandals, and before Conops had done staring pop-eyed at the rugs and gilded couch, the little Greek bronze images of half a dozen gods, the curtains from Damascus and the pottery from Crete, Chloe stood rearrayed in front of them, fresh flowers in her hair, in gilded sandals, with a wide gold border on a snow-white chlamys. Over her shoulders was a shawl more beautiful than anything Orwic had ever seen.

"You, a slave?" he said, staring, wishing his own tunic was not soiled from the night's adventure.

Smiling at him merrily, she read and understood the chivalry that stirred him. Suddenly her face turned wistful, but she was careful not to let Conops see the changed expression. Levantines were experts in incredulity.

"Yes," she said, "but you can help me to be free. Will you wait her while I find the Lord Tros?"

She was gone before he could answer, closing the door but not locking it, as Orwic was quick to discover. He would have followed her to ask more questions, but the two Numidians prevented him politely enough but firmly, drawing no particular attention to the great curved swords they held. Star-

ing at them, realizing they were slaves, Orwic decided that he and Conops could quite easily defeat them if necessity arose. Noticing there was no lock on the outside of the door, but only a slide-bolt on the inside, he returned to question the two women.

But they knew no Gaulish. One of them was fussing over Conops, putting up a brave pretense of being thrilled by his advances, which were seamanly of the harbor-front sort. Conops began to sing a song in Greek that all home-faring sailors heard along the wharves of Antioch, Joppa, Alexandria and wherever else the harpy women waited to deprive them of the coins earned in the teeth of Neptune's gales. It was not a civilized song, though it was old when Homer was a youth in Chios, and its words aimed at the core of primitive emotion.

To keep him entertained, the women danced for him when one of them had brought out wine from the inner room. And because the dance was not the bawdy entertainment of the beach-booths, but a sort of poetry of motion beyond Conops' ken, they kept him half excited and half mystified, thus manageable until Chloe came back, lithe and alert in the doorway, with a look of triumph in her eyes.

"Tros?" Orwic asked her instantly.

"He has gone with Pkauchios to Balbus' house," she answered.

But it was once more clear to Orwic she was lying. Tros, he knew, would never have gone away without first setting eyes on him, or, at any rate, without first sending a message, if only a word or two of reassurance.

"What did he say?" he demanded.

"He was gone when I got to the house."

That, too, was a lie. She had been gone too long not to have talked with somebody; and there was a look of triumph in her eyes, that she was trying to conceal but could not.

"I, too, go to Balbus!" said Orwic. He gestured to

Conops to follow, and strode for the door with his left hand on his sword-hilt.

Chloe slammed the door shut and stood defiant with her back against it.

"Prince of Britain!" she said, laughing, but her laugh was challenging and confident. "Be wise! All Gades would like Chloe for a friend! All Gades fears the name of Pkauchios! You are safe here. I have promised the Lord Tros no harm shall happen to you, and he holds my pledge."

Orwic sat down on the gilded couch to disarm her alertness. It offended his notions of chivalry to feel obliged to use force to a woman, but the mystery annoyed him more than the dilemma. It had begun to dawn on him that he was dealing with a girl whose instinct for intrigue prevented her from telling stark truth about anything. For a second, observing Conops' antics through the corner of his eye, he even thought of making love to her; but he was too much of an aristocrat for that thought to prevail; he would have felt ashamed to let Conops see him do it.

Above all else he felt stupid and embarrassed in the strange environment, aware that he would be as helpless as a child by daylight in the city streets. He had not even the remotest notion how a Roman would behave himself in Gades, and was sure the crowd would detect his foreign bearing in an instant. His Celtic diffidence and thin-skinned fear of being laughed at so oppressed him that he actually laughed at his own embarrassment.

"That is better!" said Chloe and sat down beside him.

But he noticed she had shot the door-bolt, and he did not doubt there was some trick to the thing that would baffle anybody in a hurry.

"Why do you keep on lying to me?" he demanded.

"Don't you know all women lie?" she asked him. "We arrive at the truth by other means than by telling it. Prince of Britain, if I told you naked truth you would believe me mad, and you would act so madly there would be no saving you!"

Conops was becoming rougher and more like an animal every minute. Chloe's two slave-women were having all their work to keep out of his clutches, the one teasing while the other broke away, turn and turn. At last he seized one woman's wrist and twisted it. She screamed.

Chloe sprang to the rescue, broke a jar over Conops' head, and had his knife before he could turn to defend himself. He knew better than to try to snatch the knife back. His practised eye could tell that she could use it.

"Pardon, mistress!" he said civilly. "I was only playing with the girls."

Chloe tossed the knife into the air and caught it, noticing that both men wondered at her skill. She said something in Greek, too swift and subtle for Conops' marlin-spike intelligence — more dull than usual just then from the effect of honied wine and an emotion stirred by dancing girls — then frowned, her mind searching for phrases in Gaulish.

"You can use weapons," she said, her gesture including both men. "I, too. The Armenian who trained me meant me for a female gladiator. But the *ædile*\* to whom I was offered said it would be bad for Roman morals, so I was sold to Pkauchios. You are male and I female. What else is there that you are, and I not?"

Orwic smiled his way into her trap.

"Are you free?" he suggested. "I am a prince of Britain." He said it very courteously.

"Now! This morning!" she retorted. "How about to-night? My father and my mother were free citizens of Athens, if you know where that is. The Roman armies came. I was sold at my mother's breast. She

\* *Ædile*: The elected Roman official responsible for the public games and the adornment of the city, which he had to provide largely at his own expense. *Ædileship* was a stepping stone to higher office. *Ædiles* ran extravagantly into debt in the hope of reimbursing themselves if elected to a consulship.

died of lifting grape baskets in a Falerian vineyard, and I was sold to the Armenian, whose trade was the invention of new orgies. But I was not quite like the ordinary run of slave-girls, so I was spared a number of indignities for the sake of the high price I might bring. If the Armenian had not set such a high price on me, I think the ædile would not have talked so glibly about morals. Today I am a slave. To-night I think I will be a freed woman; tomorrow, wholly free. And you? Does it occur to you, Prince of Britain, that there is none but I who can keep you from falling into Balbus' hands? Balbus would condemn you as an enemy of Rome. He would put you up at auction to the highest bidder. Why, you might be my slave in a week from now!"

She had his attention at any rate. He laughed and his hand went to his sword-hilt, but his eyes looked worried. Conops watched her with a gleam in his one, steely eye, his muscles tightening for a sudden leap at her, but she understood Conops perfectly and changed the long knife from her left hand to her right with a convincing flicker of the bright Damascus steel.

"You sit there and keep still!" she ordered. "I am not concerned about you in the least. You may die if you wish! You," she said, looking at Orwic, "shall not be harmed if I can help it. You must make up your mind you will trust me, or else —"

"Why did you lie?" Orwic asked her.

She laughed.

"You are here. You are safe. If I had told you the Lord Tros was on his ship, would you have come with me?"

Orwic shrugged his shoulders. "Well, what next?" he asked.

"You must do exactly what I say. Pkauchios knows you are here. He has gone to Balbus to persuade him to let the Lord Tros anchor in the harbor unmolested."

"Could he prevent that?" Orwic asked, remembering Tros's great catapults and arrow-engines.



"And to persuade Balbus to invite Tros ashore for a conference under guarantee of protection. When Pkauchios returns, I will take you to him and leave you with him. I have told Pkauchios, and I will tell him again that you are a superstitious savage. Remember that. You are to agree to anything that Pkauchios proposes, no matter what it is."

"And you?"

"I go to Tros and perhaps also to Balbus. I take Conops with me because Tros, perhaps, might not believe me when I tell him you are unharmed, and I think the Lord Tros is not easy to manage. Also, Conops is a nuisance, who will get drunk presently, and there is no place to lock him up except in the *ergastulum*. And I can take Conops through the streets in daylight because he is a Greek who will arouse no comment."

"And if I refuse to trust you?" Orwic asked.

"I will have to lock you both in the *ergastulum*. It is not a pleasant place. It is dark in there, and dirty. There are insects. Listen!" she said, obviously making a concession to his prejudices.

A blind man could have guessed it went against the grain in her to lift a corner of the curtain of intrigue.

"You will spoil everything unless you obey me absolutely! Tros wants — I don't know what. But I will get it for him. I go presently to make sure that Balbus' promise of protection shall be worth more than the breath he breathes out when he makes it. Simon the Jew wants his money. Tros, I think, can get it for him. I want my freedom. Pkauchios, well, Pkauchios himself will tell you what he wants. Are you still afraid to trust me? Listen then. Tros holds a pledge of mine worth more to me than all the wealth of Gades. He keeps my lover on his ship!"

If Orwic had known more about the reputation of the Gades dancing girls, he would have mistrusted her the more for that admission. But she would not have made it to a man of more experience. She was as

shrewd as he was innocent. Conops, cynically sneering, merely rallied Orwic's inborn chivalry:

"Huh!! In Gades they change lovers just as often as the ships come in!"

Whatever she was or was not, Chloe looked virginal in that Greek chlamys with the plain gold border and the flowers in her hair. And whatever she felt or did not feel, she could act the very subtleties of an emotion instantly. She looked stung, baffled, conscious of the servitude that made her reputation any man's to sneer away, ashamed, albeit modest and aware of inner dignity. She blushed. Her eyes showed anger that she seemed to know was useless. Orwic passionately pitied her.

"You dog!" he snarled disgustedly through set teeth. "Go with her! Go back to Tros! And when I come, if I learn you have not treated her respectfully, I will have Tros tie you to the mast and flog you — as he did the rowers when they shamed those girls in Vectis!"

"Oh, never mind him," said Chloe. "He is only a sailor."

She hung her head, as Orwic believed, bashfully. But Conops understood right well it was to hide the flash of triumph in her eyes. She had Orwic where she wanted him. But what could a cynical seaman do or say, though he knew all ports and had been tangled in many snares of siren women, to convince a nobleman of Britain that a gesture and a glance were possibly play acting and not proof of honesty? Conops shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he said. "I'll go with her to the ship. You stay here and run your own risks!"

## *Chapter XI*

### *GAIUS SUETONIUS*

*My father taught me, and I know, that manners*

*are the cloak of dignity, and dignity is man's awareness of his own Soul.*

*But I have yet to learn that peacock people are entitled to the courtesies that manhood commands without asking.*

From the Log of Tros of Samothrace

The first rule of all crises being that no man behaves according to the law of averages, if there is one, or according to expectation or in keeping with the dignity of great events — which surely calls for a continuous procession of brass bands, torches, incense and acclamation — Tros and Simon slept. They snored, Tros forward on the table, Simon leaning sackwise in the chair. They were fast asleep at dawn when Sigurdson appeared, enormous in the cabin doorway, to announce the first glimpse of the sun.

"Tide in about an hour, Lord Tros!"

Simon snored on. Tros blew the air out of his lungs, filled them two or three times, felt by instinct for his sword, simultaneously glancing at the water clocks, ran fingers through his long, black hair, looked curiously once or twice at Simon, nodded and knew his mind.

"Serve breakfast. Then out oars! Man arrow-engines, clear away the catapults, ammunition ready in the racks, deck crew at quarters. Then haul short. We enter Gades harbor when the tide makes."

The ship became a thing of ordered tumult, din succeeding din and a smell of hot smoked fish pervading. Simon awoke with a number of grunts and "ohs" and "ahs," remembered where he was and fell incontinently into panic.

"Tros! Tros!" he gasped. "We talked madness!"

"Aye, Simon, aye! The gods love madmen!"

"Phagh! You sicken me with talk of many gods! Why not have a row of smirking idols? Worship them! Such talk, such talk, and we, looking death in the face!"

"We will see Gades first and then look Balbus in

the face!" Tros answered. "Simon — madder than the gods themselves and than the wind and waves, a man needs be who will risk his neck for friendship! Aye, mad enough to trespass in the porch of wisdom! Rot me reason and religion when the die is cast! Talk yesterday, act now, to-morrow shall say yea or nay to it!"

He laughed and went up on the poop to watch the ship made ready, washed down, cleared for action, ammunition set in racks and baskets, sand-boxes filled, pumps tested and the trained crews stationed each in its appointed place. Then he ordered one great purple sail spread as a tribute to his own pride, and started the drums and cymbals going to slow measure, that the oars might take up the strain on the anchor-cable.

He gave the helm to Sigurdson and whistled to himself, striding from side to side of the broad poop to con the harbor entrance, pausing in his stride to listen when the Northman in the chains called out the soundings, memorizing landmarks, feeling as brave and careless as he looked in his gold-edged purple cloak. He wished there might be fifty thousand Romans on the beach to see his ship come in!

But the harbor, splendid with its thirty-mile circumference, looked strangely empty. There was one great trireme hauled out on the beach beside a row of sheds, and six ships that had wintered on the beach lay newly launched, high-sided, all in ballast. One long rakish craft was certainly from Delos, anchored apart from the others — probably a pirate captured by a Roman fleet and kept to be taken to Ostia and sold at auction. Vague objects fastened in her rigging looked suspiciously like the remains of human bodies crucified and picked to pieces by the sea-birds.

Fishing boats swarmed on the beach and at anchor nearer shore, and there were rows of sheds in straight lines at the seaward end of a narrow road that led

from city wall to beach. The city gleamed white in the sun, but its high wall looked dirty and needed repair; outside the wall there were villages of shacks and shambles clustered close against it, and between them a tired looking grove of palm trees, surrounded a cluster of thatched booths.

Between city wall and harbor was a waste of common land, all swamp and rubbish heaps. The shore was piled with seaweed, rotten with the colors of decay and black with flies.

The principal signs of Roman rule were the villas of officials set in gardens near the summit of the slope on which the city stood and, on a hill to the north of the city, a military camp with regular lines of tents and huts and four straight, paved roads leading to it. The lower part of the city was a crowded jumble of mixed Carthaginian, Greek, Roman and native roofs.

Tros dropped anchor within catapult range of the hauled-out trireme. That and the store-sheds were at his mercy, although the city itself was beyond reach of his flaming stinkballs. Trembling, gnawing at a hot smoked herring, Simon came to the poop and pointed out the sheds where all the wine was stored for export to Alexandria in exchange for corn and onions.

"We'll save Pompey's people a few headaches by destroying that stuff unless Balbus comes to terms!" said Tros.

But there were already signs of Balbus. A liburnian put out from a wharf near the store-sheds, leisurely rowed by slaves in clean white uniforms. It had a bronze standard in the bow with the initials S.P.Q.R., and in the stern under an awning sat a Roman, dressed in the latest military fashion.

Simultaneously, another swifter boat, whose crew were not so neatly dressed nor nearly so in love with dignity, put out from a point much nearer to the ship and speeded at the rate of two to the liburnian's one. It had no awning. Chloe in the stern was plainly visible encouraging the rowers. Conops sat beside her.

The smaller, faster boat bumped alongside, reckless



of Tros's vermilion paint, and Chloe came up the rope-ladder like an acrobat, bacchanalian with her wreath awry and her gilded sandals stained with harbor water.

"Lord Tros!" she exclaimed, breathless with excitement, "your great ship makes a braver spectacle than any Gades ever saw! I love it! We all love it! Look!"

She waved her hand toward the city wall whose summit was already black with people gazing. But Tros took more note of a hundred men who marched behind a mounted officer from the camp to the north of the city toward the shore.

"Orwic?" he demanded.

Conops answered him, climbing the poop steps sullenly with the air of a man expecting punishment:

"He lingers with the dancing women in a marble palace. Master, he refused to come away with me!"

Chloe seized Tros's arm and began speaking in a hurry with excited emphasis.

"Trust me! Now trust me, Lord Tros! Your prince of Britain is absolutely safe! Look you! In that liburnian sits Gaius Suetonius. He is a youngster whom Cæsar sent to Balbus with a recommendation, a wastrel whom Cæsar wished to be rid of, but whom he did not care to offend because of his influence in Rome. Balbus makes a lot of him for Cæsar's sake, and also because they play into each other's hands to cheat the treasury. He comes with Balbus' permission to you to go ashore and talk with him. Now listen, listen, listen! Gaius Suetonius knows most of Balbus' secrets. Balbus would never dare to let him —"

"I understand," Tros answered and strode to the break of the poop to summon men to stand by the ladder and salute the Roman.

He was just in time to provide a flourish of drums and trumpets and to rearrange his own purple cloak becomingly. Chloe vanished into the cabin and Simon followed.

The Roman approached the poop with the peculiar, half patronizing, noncommittal but amused air of the aristocratic Roman face to face with something new.

The sun shone on his heavily embossed bronze body armor and his nodding crimson plume was nearly twice the regulation size. He was immaculate down to the tips of his finger-nails, much too calculating, insolent and greedy looking to be handsome but possessed of strong, regular features and a muscularity not yet much softened by debauch. His richly decorated shield was borne behind him by a Greek slave, the impudence of whose stare was an exaggeration of his master's.

Tros eyed them sourly, but obliged himself to smile a little when the Roman condescendingly acknowledged the salute.

"You are Tros of Samothrace? I am Gaius Suetonius, master of the ceremonies and confidential agent of Lucius Cornelius Balbus Minor, Governor of Gades."

Tros bowed suitable acknowledgement. The Roman turned himself at leisure to observe the arrow-engines and the crews at battle station by the catapults.

"What does this warlike preparation mean?" he asked.

"I am prepared!" Tros answered with a characteristic upward gesture of both hands. His left hand returned to his sword-hilt, whereat the Roman looked as if he had a bad smell under his nose.

"Prepared for what?"

"To receive your message and to answer hot or cold, whichever it calls for."

"You are insolent."

"Balbus charged you with something definite to say. I listen."

"You would have found it wiser to have been courteous to me!" said Gaius Suetonius angrily. "You will find insolence expensive!"

Tros almost turned his back, which brought him face to face with Conops, standing by the poop rail. He made a gesture, unseen by the Roman. Conops vaulted to the deck and went forward without noticeable haste. The Roman turned as if about to go and spoke over his shoulder to add visible rudeness to his tone of cold contempt.

"Lucius Cornelius Balbus Minor invites you to the courthouse at the morning session to confer with him. He promises immunity for the occasion."

"Wait!"

Tros's voice was like a thunder clap. It startled the Roman into facing about — suddenly, indignantly. So he did not notice the dozen Northmen whom Conops was shepherding one by one under the break of the poop. They came unostentatiously, but armed.

"Did Lucius Cornelius Balbus offer a guarantee?" Tros asked.

"You have his promise conveyed by me," Gaius Suetonius retorted, sneering. But Tros smiled.

"It appears to me he sent you as hostage!"

The Roman's jaw dropped.

"By Bacchus!" he exploded. "You will suffer for it if you try to make me prisoner! I represent the Senate and the Roman People!"

"Aye, handsomely!" Tros answered, grinning. "I wouldn't spoil your finery! You and that slave of yours shall have snug quarters for a while, where he may keep your armor bright and you may tell him all about the Senate and the Roman People. Lest he grow weary of listening and try to slay you with that sword, I will keep it well out of his reach!"

Tros held out his hand. The Roman's right hand went to his sword-hilt and his face turned crimson with anger, the slave behind him made haste to pass the shield, but Conops was too quick, struck the slave over the jugular and the shield went clattering to the deck. The Northmen swarmed on to the poop and the Roman saw himself surrounded.

"Dog of a pirate, you shall pay for this!" he snarled. He held his chin high, but he drew his sword and gave it hilt-first into Tros's hand. Tros glanced at Conops.

"Into the forward deckhouse with them! Lock them in. No other restraint as long as they behave themselves. Stand you on guard with as many Northmen as you need."

Gaius Suetonius strode forward fuming in the midst

of his ax-armed escort. Tros could not resist a gibe at him.

“An omen! Lo, the Consul and his lictors! Is the foretaste of a consulship not worth the day’s confinement, Gaius Suetonius?”

Tros went into the cabin where Simon sat with his head between his hands refusing to listen to Chloe’s optimistic reassurances. And after a short conference with Chloe he wrote a letter in Greek because, though he understood Latin well enough, he could write the Greek more elegantly.

To the most noble and renowned Lucius Cornelius Balbus Minor, Governor of Gades, Greeting from Tros of Samothrace, the Master of the Trireme *Liafail*, who cordially thanks you for your invitation to attend you at a session of the court.

Your statesmanlike provision of a hostage in the person of the noble Gaius Suetonius removes all possible objection to my visit which, therefore, shall be made without delay, the more so since I appreciate the compliment of sending me as hostage one of such rank and so intimate in your secret consels.

The hostage shall be comfortably housed and safely guarded. He shall be released unharmed, with the dignities due to his rank immediately after my own safe return on board my ship.

That morning irony was running in Tros’s veins. He felt an impulse to be mischievous. To use his own phrase, gods were whispering good jokes into his ear. A glance at Simon, shuddering with nervousness, and at Chloe, all smiles and excitement, confirmed his mood. He opened an iron chest and took from it the seal he had captured a year ago along with Cæsar’s private papers.

It was a glass of marvelous workmanship, done by a Greek — a portrait of Julius Cæsar naked, in the guise of the god Hermes with an elephant’s head below it, by the hand of some other artist who had certainly never seen an elephant.\*

Tros melted a mass of wax and affixed the impres-

\* The elephant’s head became the seal of all the Cæsars.

sion of that well-known seal at the foot of the letter, which he placed in a silver tube, and went and tossed it to the men in the boat that had brought out Gaius Suetonius.

"To the Governor of Gades with all haste!" he commanded.

The boat backed away and made speed for the shore. Tros returned to the cabin and sent for Sigurdson and Conops.

"In my absence," he said, touching Sigurdson's breast, "you are captain of the ship. The crew obeys you. But you obey Conops, who is my representative. I go ashore, and unless I return before dawn tomorrow you will put to sea after demolishing that trireme on the beach and all the stores and sheds. If I shall have been made prisoner, that hint will probably convince the Romans they would better release me. So you will keep in sight of the harbor mouth and hold speech with any boat the Romans send out. But you are not to surrender that hostage Gaius Suetonius except in exchange for me."

"Master, let me go with you!" urged Conops.

But there was no need for Chloe's warning frown; Tros had made up his mind.

"I can trust you afloat," he remarked. "Ashore you're too ready with your knife and a lot too fond of drink and women! Stand by the ship. You're in charge. Be careful of the prisoners.

Jaun Aksue came then, none too deferential, demanding information as to when the shore leave might be had.

"We Eskualdenak are fond of seeing promises performed," he remarked. "My men are boasting they could swim ashore. Can you suggest to me how to restrain them?"

"Yes," Tros answered gravely, "tell them I go to pay a visit to the Governor of Gades. I will seek permission for my best behaved men to go roistering. But have you seen those Balearic slingers on the beach? You know their reputation? They can hit a



man's head with a slung stone at two hundred paces. None of you have weapons. And mark this: Balbus the Governor needs cheap slaves for his quarry gangs. I will make him a free present of as many of my men as those Balearic slingers stun with their stones and capture!"

"But your promise holds? We are to have shore leave?"

"Certainly," said Tros, "but when it suits me and on condition you pretend you are my slaves."

Chloe listened to that conversation, her eyes intently studying Tros's face. She turned to him and touched his arm when Aksue swaggered forward to explain the situation to his men.

"Lord Tros!" she exclaimed. "You can make yourself master of Gades! I can show you how! Make use of Pkauchios until the moment when he — then —"

Tros gazed at her, his amber eyes admiring and yet smiling with a comprehension deeper than her own. It baffled her.

"What do you really seek in Gades?" she demanded.

He did not answer her for thirty seconds. Then:

"For a beginning, the Lord Orwic. Where is he?"

"In Pkauchios' house."

Tros nodded.

"You shall take me to Pkauchios."

His eyes did not leave her face. All sorts of probabilities were passing in review before his mind, not least of them that a Gades dancing girl would hardly carry all her eggs in one chance-offered basket. She would have alternatives that she could switch to at a moment's notice.

"You would better go down in the hold," he remarked, "and confer with Horatius Verres. Better ask him whether he won't change his mind and try his luck again ashore."

It seemed to Tros that Chloe caught her breath, but she was so well trained in self-command that he could not be quite sure.

"I will go to him, I will warn him to stay where he

is," she said, smiling, and was already on her way, but Tros detained her.

"Wait! He goes ashore now to take his chance in Gades unless you tell me who and what he is."

Chloe stared, at first impudently, then with wavering emotions. Her lips began to move as if in spite of her.

"Tros of Samothrace, you are a strong man, yet you are not a pig. You have not made love to me. I can trust you?"

"Yes," said Tros.

"If I tell you who Horatius Verres is —"

"I will keep it secret."

"He is Cæsar's spy!"

Tros did not move, although he shaped his lips as if to whistle.

"Cæsar spies on Balbus?"

Chloe nodded. Tros began to stroke his chin.

"Horatius Verres has sent his messenger to Gaul," said Chloe. "There is nothing further he can do until —"

Tros seized her shoulder.

"Until what?"

"Until Cæsar himself comes!"

"Hispania is not Cæsar's province! Cæsar has Gaul. Pompey has Hispania."

"I know it!"

"When does he come?"

"I don't know! Nobody knows! Horatius Verres doesn't know!"

"And Balbus?"

"No. He doesn't dream of it!"

"By land or sea?"

"None knows! Cæsar never tells what he will do."

"And Horatius Verres waits for him, eh? — on my ship!"

"Tros, Lord Tros, you promised —"

"Go and talk to your Verres. Tell him I know he is Cæsar's spy. Say I will not interfere with him."

"I will not! If I admitted I had told you, he would

cease to love me. He would say I am a common Gades dancing girl."

"Tell him I guessed he is Cæsar's spy."

"He would never believe. He is too keen. He can read me like writing."

"I have seen writings that deceived the reader," Tros remarked and stroked his chin again.

"Listen!" exclaimed Chloe. "Thus it happened: Cæsar sent a thousand Gauls to Gades to be shipped to Rome for sale for his private account. Balbus put them in the quarries, where the most part died for he did not feed them properly and there was a fever.\* Cæsar, receiving no word of the arrival of the slaves in Ostia, sent Horatius Verres to find out about it. He spied and he discovered that Pkauchios, pretending to have read the stars, told Balbus he might safely keep the slaves because Cæsar will presently die."

"How did Verres discover that?" Tros asked.

"I told him! Pkauchios makes prophecies come true. You understand me? He sent his own men to Gaul to murder Cæsar. I knew all about it. I told Horatius Verres because he said he loves me, and I know I can trust you, Tros of Samothrace. But then I had to tell more, just as a witness has to when the torturers go to work. One piece of information led quite simply to the next. I told Horatius Verres how Pkauchios grew afraid that when Cæsar is slain Balbus might turn on him and have him crucified for the sake of appearances. There are always plots on foot in Gades, so Pkauchios joined a conspiracy to murder Balbus. He began by merely listening and giving his advice, but now he leads it. And I am afraid! I am afraid Balbus may discover everything and put me to the torture. That is why I want my freedom quickly, quickly, why I want to get away from Gades!"

"And Horatius Verres lies in hiding while all this is afoot?"

"He hides from Pkauchios. Somebody, I don't know who, warned Pkauchios, who put a dozen men

\* Gades was always one of the unhealthiest places in Europe.

to look for him and kill him. But he was hiding in the midst of danger, on the roof of the *ergastulum*."

"Hasn't he tried to warn Balbus?"

"He daren't. Besides, what does he care about Balbus? He is Cæsar's man."

"What do you mean by 'he daren't'?"

"Balbus would order his head cut off or have him stabbed or crucify him. As soon as Pkauchios learned there was a spy of Cæsar's in Gades, he pretended to read the stars and went to Balbus, saying there would come a Roman with a tale about conspiracies, but that the tale would be a lie and that the man's real purpose would be to get Balbus into difficulties with the Roman Senate."

"And Balbus believed that?" Tros whistled softly to himself. "And the Lord Orwic is with Pkauchios? And, why waits Pkauchios?" he demanded. "Why hasn't he slain Balbus?"

"He likes others to do that work," Chloe answered. "And the others are hard to bring up to the point. They are half mistrustful, and they fear the soldiers. It is always so in Gades — talk, talk, talk, and then some one at last dares it or else somebody betrays. There has been one betrayal already. Balbus has made some unimportant prisoners. But I think this time Pkauchios has his plans well laid and merely waits for the news of Cæsar's death. Then he will strike swiftly, and he thinks all Hispania and Gaul will rise together and throw off the Roman yoke."

Tros laughed.

"Your Pkauchios can dream!" he said with irony. "When Gaul joins Hispania against the Romans we may look for the Greek Kalends! Divide — *divide et impera!*\* Go and talk to Horatius Verres in the hold. Reassure him and be swift about it. You shall take me to the courthouse to see Balbus, and thereafter to the house of Pkauchios."

She hesitated. There was indecision, terror in her

\* "Divide and rule," the motto of the Roman Empire and the secret of its mastery.

eyes. Her muscles twitched at the thought of the Roman tortures. Tros nodded to her confidently.

"You shall have your freedom and your pearls and your Horatius Verres before to-morrow's dawn!"

Chloe stared into his amber eyes, nodded to herself, and went down into the hold to do his bidding.

## Chapter XII

### PKAUCHIOS THE ASTROLOGER

*It has been my destiny to speak with wisemen, of whom there are more in the world than fools imagine. Though I comprehend not wisdom, I respect it; to salute it stirs in me no shame, whatever else. My sword and my whole heart are at wisdom's bidding, if I find it. But the wise are wisely quiet. They forbid not, neither do they bid me to go storming after virtue, that being the impulse to which I yield because I know no better.*

*Aye, I have met wisemen. I have yet to meet one who dealt in treachery, or counseled treason, or pretended to know what he knew not.*

From the Log of Tros of Samothrace

Chloe had pushed Orwic into a room in a marvelous marble house and left him face to face with Pkauchios, closing the curtains behind him on their noisy rings and rod. Orwic stared at the Egyptian, wondering at the severely splendid furnishings and at the quiet that was accented by lute strings strummed slowly in another room, suggesting the procession of the æons and the utter insignificance of days — months — years.

Pkauchios was dressed as an astrologer — a tall old man, immensely dignified, in flowing black robes and head-dress, with the asp of Egypt on his brow, to which Tros would have at once known he was not



entitled. But Orwic knew nothing about Egypt. He had an hypnotic presence, and used his large eyes, as a swordsman should, directing his gaze not at the pupils of the man in front of him but a fraction of an inch lower, so producing the effect of an indomitable stare without wearying himself or giving his opponent a chance to retaliate.

He possessed almost the majesty of a Lord Druid, but that only served to remind Orwic of the druids' warnings about magic. He had been educated by the druids, and whatever else they taught, they were succinct and vehement in their instruction as to the danger of any contact with the black arts.

Bridling at the calculated silence, Orwic broke it, asking curt, blunt questions:

"You are Pkauchios? I am Orwic of Britain. You sent for me? You wish to speak to me? What do you wish to say?"

There was no answer, no acknowledgement. Sweet-scented incense of lign-aloes burned on a tripod-table, and its blue smoke curled around the Egyptian until, where he stood in shadow, he began to look unearthly, and the human skull on another table near his right hand appeared to make grimaces, mocking the short-lived dreams of men.

Orwic shrugged his shoulders and strolled to the open window. Down a vista between well-tended garden shrubbery he could see Tros's ship at anchor, miles away. The sight encouraged him; he began to think of jumping through the window, measuring with his eyes the height of the wall at the end of the garden and calculating the distance to the beach. But the Egyptian spoke at last —

"Orwic, Prince of Britain, fortune favors you!"

The voice was resonant, arresting, but the Gaulish words were ill pronounced. Orwic remembered druids who had spoken in much the same terms more gently, and yet with infinitely greater majesty.

"I was born lucky," he answered over his shoulder,

and then resumed his gaze out of the window.

"Look at me. Look into my eyes," said Pkauchios.

"I admire the view," said Orwic, and continued to admire it.

Pkauchios ignored the snub and went on speaking as if Orwic had obeyed him. He badly mispronounced the Gaulish, but his voice compelled attention, and he was fluent.

"I, who nightly read the stars, have read your destiny! I forewarned Balbus of the great ship with the golden serpent at her bow. The stars in their conjunction said that ship should — shall — must enter Gades harbor, and from out of her shall step one in whose hand is the destiny of Hispania and Gaul. I said, because the constellations indicated, that the man will be a prince from a far country, bold in war, young, handsome, destined to be lost in Gades but to be recovered by a stranger. Last night I told Balbus that the prince in the ship with the purple sails will arrive before dawn."

"Well. Here I am, but it is not my ship," said Orwic, and began to whistle softly to himself. When he was a little boy the druids told him that was the simplest means of avoiding a magician's snares.

But magicians are not easily rebuffed. The business of snaring men in nets made of imagination implies a thick skin and persistence, along with an immeasurable, cynical contempt for the prospective victim's powers of resistance.

"You are indeed the man the stars foretold," said Pkauchios with admiration in his voice. "Indifferent to flattery, not stirred by rumor, iron-willed! It is of such men that the gods make weapons when the tyrannies shall fall! I see your aura — purple as the sails of yonder ship!"

He struck a bronze gong and the music in the next room ceased. The sound of the gong startled Orwic, for it resembled the clash of weapons. He turned suddenly to face the Egyptian, who was no longer standing but seated on a sort of throne, whose arms

were the gilded tusks of elephants. There was a canopy above the throne that threw that corner into deeper shadow, and the Egyptian's eyes appeared to blaze as if there were fire in them. In his lap he held a crystal ball, which he raised in both hands when he was sure that Orwic's gaze was fixed on him.

"Approach me!" he commanded. "Nay, not too close, or your shadow dims the astral light!"

He was staring at the crystal, frowning heavily, brows raised, lips parted, eyes glaring. The effort he was making seemed to tax his powers almost beyond endurance.

"You are the man!" he said at last, and sighing, set the crystal down on the table where the skull stood. His eyes had lost their frenzy suddenly. He leaned back, looking deathly weary, all the lines and wrinkles on his dark face emphasized by pallor.

"You, who listen, never know what we, who look into the unseen, suffer for your sakes," he said.

Even his voice was aged. Orwic began to feel pity for him, and something akin to shame for his former rudeness.

Pkauchios left the throne and walking forward wearily took Orwic by the arm. His manner was of age that leaned on youth with perfect confidence.

"So, help me to that seat and sit beside me."

They sat down on a bench of carved ebony and Pkauchios leaned his back against the wall.

"Youth! Youth!" he said. "With all the world before you! Age must serve youth. We who have struggled and are old may justify ourselves if we can guide youth through the dangers. Age and responsibility! If I should guide you wrongly, what responsibility were mine! I will say nothing. It is wiser. I will not foreshadow destiny."

Now that was something like the druid's way of viewing interference with a man's own privilege of living as he sees fit. Orwic began to feel a vague respect for the Egyptian and to wonder whether he had not misjudged him. He might, after all, be a

seer. It was hardly reasonable to suppose that all the prophets were in Britain. However, Orwic was still cautious.

"I don't believe in magic," he remarked.

"Rightly! Rightly so!" said Pkauchios. "It is destruction. It will destroy the Romans. It has ruined nations without number. Fools, who know no better, call me a magician. When I tell the truth to them, they weary me with their demands for untruth. It is restful to meet you. Honest unbelief is sweeter to me than the dark credulity of those who seek nothing but their selfish ends. Your incredulity will melt. Their superstition toughens as it feeds on vice. But I must crave your pardon. I am a laggard host, forgetting the body's needs in the absorption of a spiritual moment. You are hungry, I have no doubt."

He clapped his hands, and almost on the instant two slave girls appeared bearing trays heaped with refreshment. One of them washed Orwic's hands and combed his hair; the other spread before him milk, fruit, nuts, three sorts of bread, butter, honey and preserves, whose very scent excited appetite.

"I will return when you have refreshed yourself," said Pkauchios. "We who commune with the stars eat little earthly food."

He left the room, but the slave girls stayed and converted Orwic's first meal on foreign soil into an experience that melted his reserve.

He began by being half ashamed to eat while the Egyptian fasted, remembering that the druids hardly ate at all during their periods of spiritual commune with the universe. He began to be almost sure that fasting was a sign of the Egyptian's purity of purpose. It was incredible that such food as the slave girls set before him should not tempt a man with worldly motives — such as Orwic's own, for instance.

He began to confess to himself that he was having a glorious time, and he hoped Tros would not come for him too soon. Deeply though he admired Tros, loyal though he felt toward him, he dreaded

Tros's abrupt way of dispersing dreams and scattering side issues. He could imagine Tros's contempt, for instance, for the slave girls. Orwic liked them.

Used to slaves and serving-women in his own land, he had never dreamed of such attentions as these two dark-haired women lavished on him. They were beautiful, smiling, silent, exquisitely trained, but that was not the half of it. In Britain guests were made to feel that their comfort was the host's one sole consideration, and the servants vied with one another to that end. But those two slave girls made a man feel that he owned them, that their very souls were his, that they would think his thoughts if he would only deign to half express them, and be overjoyed to be the mothers of his sons.

It was bewildering at first, embarrassing; then gradually rather pleasant; presently as natural as if all other forms of hospitality were crude, uncivilized and no part of a nobleman's experience. This was the way to live. It was no wonder that foreigners regarded Britons as barbarians, with their crude ideas of courtesy and the servants' air of being members of the family instead of servants in the true sense of the word.

One of the girls was on his knee when Pkauchios returned. She was wiping his mouth and moustache with a napkin. She removed herself in no haste, unembarrassed, curtsying to her master, helping the other girl at once to carry out the tray and dishes. Pkauchios took no notice of either of them, which seemed to Orwic to prove that the man was an aristocrat, if nothing else.

"You are right, you are right," said Pkauchios, taking a seat beside him. "You should have nothing to do with magic. It is safer to avoid true revelation than to listen to the false. But tell me why you came to Gades."

Orwic told him all of it; told him the whole story of how Cæsar had invaded Britain and had been repulsed; and how Tros of Samothrace, for friendship



and because his ship was built in Britain, had undertaken to go to Rome and by any means that should present themselves to deter Cæsar from invading a second time.

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" said Pkauchios when the tale was done and Orwic had finished his eulogiums of Tros. "All this and more I have seen written in the stars. You are a man of destiny. And yet —"

He leaned into the corner, frowning. It appeared that the decision between right and wrong, between his own high standard of integrity and a convenient alternative was forming in his brain.

"— if I should tell you what else I have seen —"

"Oh, you may as well tell me," Orwic interrupted. "I am not a child. And besides, I will do nothing without consulting Tros."

"Do you not see," said Pkauchios, "that if Hispania were to rebel against the Romans, Cæsar's army would be needed to prevent the Gauls from rising too?"

"Yes, that seems obvious," said Orwic. He was devoting at least half his attention to wondering where those slave girls were. The scent from the one who had sat on his knee still clung to his tunic. No British girls that he had known had ever smelled like that.

"And if Cæsar were to die," said Pkauchios.

He paused, aware that Orwic was only partly listening to him.

"And if Cæsar were to die," he repeated solemnly, then suddenly he gripped Orwic's arm and leaning forward, fixing him with penetrating gaze, almost hissed the words:

"Do you not see that you and Tros of Samothrace, with Hispania in red rebellion, north, south, east and west, could lead the insurrection into Gaul and stir the Gauls until they, too, rise against the Romans?"

He sat back again and sighed.

"All this," he said, "and more, I have seen written in the stars. Sight must be given us that we may see. And yet —"

"Such a deed would save Britain," remarked Orwic. He was thinking now.

He was still aware of the faint, delicious woman smell, but its effect on him was changing. There were thoughts of women whom a sword could win, quite other thoughts than Orwic was accustomed to, thoughts not exactly chivalrous but blended in with chivalry, suggesting that the rescue of the Gauls from Roman rule might lead to a delightful destiny. He began to wonder what Tros would have to say to the proposal and whether Tros, too, secretly, in the recesses of his heart, would not rather like the prospect of — well — of whatever victory might provide.

"I should not be surprised at anything," he said after a moment's pause. "When I left Britain it was to face my destiny, whatever it might be. Now that girl Chloe — is it true she is your slave?"

Pkauchios' answer was startling:

"Do you covet her? Shall I give her to you?"

It was almost too startling; it rearoused suspicion. Orwic eyed the Egyptian narrowly, turning over in his mind vague notions as to how much Chloe might be worth. He was not so stupid as to believe that offer genuine.

"If you should do what the stars indicate you safely may do," Pkauchios said mysteriously, "then by to-morrow's dawn you will be all-powerful in Gades. I shall need your friendship then. To flaming youth in the hour of victory, what gift could be more suitable than Chloe? I am an old man. Her beauty means nothing to me."

Orwic's veins began to boil, so, being British, he proceeded to look preternaturally wise.

"What is all this about destiny? What did you read in the stars?" he demanded.

"You would better not let me influence you," Pkauchios suggested. "I have never yet made one mistake in reading others' destiny, but I have no right!"

"Oh, nonsense! Out with it!" said Orwic. "If you

can read my destiny, you have no right not to tell me."

"I must have your definite permission."

"You have it."

"Know then, that the stars have indicated for a month that this is the night when Balbus, Governor of Gades, dies! On this night, too, dies Cæsar, Imperator of the Roman troops in Gaul! But the conjunction of the stars is such that, if the Governor of Gades dies by the hand of a common murderer, as may be, then anarchy will follow and no good come of it. But should he die by the hand of the prince who stepped out of the red ship and was lost in Gades, then the prince shall wear a red cloak and shall rule a province."

"Strange!" said Orwic. "Strange! I have had peculiar dreams of late."

"How many men have you on board that ship?" asked Pkauchios. "If I should show you how to smuggle them ashore and where to hide them and how to reach Balbus' house unseen at midnight, and should tell you that in Balbus' treasury is money enough with which to recompense those men of yours and to pay others and to raise an army —"

"I am not a murderer. I am not a thief," said Orwic, his sense of self-restraint returning.

"Did you slay no Romans when they invaded Britain?" Pkauchios asked. "Did the Romans slay none of your friends? According to the stars that prince, who steps out of the red ship, is to be an avenger and shall drive the Romans out of Gaul!"

"Ah, now you are trying to persuade me," Orwic commented.

"Not I! But I will give you Chloe, if you seize your opportunity. She is the richest prize in Gades. She is worth two hundred thousand sesterces."

Orwic had not the slightest notion how much money that was, so he magnified it in his own mind,

and the result rearoused suspicion. He got up and began to pace the floor, to discover whether or not Pkauchios was proposing to detain him forcibly. But Pkauchios made no move; simply leaned against a corner of the wall and watched him. Orwic decided to probe deeper; he desired to justify temptation by proving to himself that Pkauchios was friend, not enemy. He drew back the curtains at the doorway by which he had entered the room. There was nobody there. He passed into a hall lined with statuary, entered rooms that opened to the right and left of it, found nobody, and tried the house door. It was unlocked; doves were cooing in the garden; fountains splashed, there were no lurkers; only a few old Egyptian slaves who dipped out water from a well a hundred yards away.

Plainly, then, he was not a prisoner. And as he breathed the incense smoke out of his lungs, refilling them with blossom-scented air, he felt the challenge of his youth and strength.

"Off Vectis, the Lord Druid said," he muttered to himself, "there is a man in Gades to whom he could have sent Tros, only that Tros's mind was closed against him. This Pkauchios is probably the man!"

Musing to himself, his hands behind him, he returned along the hall toward the room where he had left the old Egyptian. Chloe had said he should agree to anything the Egyptian should propose. It might do no harm to pretend to agree. But he wondered how he should explain away his rudeness, how he should accept the man's proffered aid now without cheapening his own position and above all, how he should explain to Tros.

"You must help me to convince the Lord Tros," he began, reentering the room.

But Pkauchios was gone. There was no trace of him nor any answer, though he called his name a dozen times.

BALBUS QUI MURUM ÆDIFICABIT

*I believe it is true that people have the rulers they deserve. The very wise have said so. Nothing that I have seen has made me think the contrary.*

*Therefore, when I observe those rulers, is it insolence in me to hope that these, whom I rule, are a little worthier than some?*

From the Log of Tros of Samothrace

Pondering the situation in all its bearings, Tros called Chloe back into the cabin while the deck crew lowered Simon into the longboat.

"Your Horatius Verres waits for Cæsar and is Cæsar's man. You have befriended Verres. Therefore Cæsar will befriend you. Why, then, should you be in haste to flee from Gades?"

"Torture!" she said and shuddered. "Horatius Verres sent a messenger who may reach Cæsar in time to warn him. But if Balbus dies and Cæsar comes, then Cæsar will investigate —"

"This is not his province. He has no authority in Hispania."

"He is Cæsar," Chloe answered. "And I shall be tortured, because Pkauchios will certainly be found out and they will need my evidence against him."

"So, unless we save Balbus' life —"

Chloe looked into Tros's eyes. She laid the palms of her hands against his breast, her lip quivering for a second — on the verge of tears, but struggling to regain her self-control.

"Lord Tros," she said, "there isn't a slave in Gades but knows Cæsar would jump at an excuse to invade Pompey's province. Pompey and Cæsar pretend to be friends. They're as friendly as two lovers of one



woman! Balbus is Pompey's nominee, and he is willing to win Gaul for Pompey or to betray Hispania into Cæsar's hands, whichever of the two he thinks is stronger. All men know there will be war before long, and none can guess whether Pompey or Cæsar will win. Pompey is lazy, proud, rich, popular. Cæsar is energetic, loved, feared, hated, deep in debt."

"Wager your peculium on Cæsar!" Tros advised.

"Nay, on Horatius Verres! Have you ever loved a woman?" she asked.

Tros did not answer. He stroked his chin, watching her eyes. She asked him another question.

"Do you think it possible for me to tell the truth?"

He nodded. He expected a prodigious lie was coming. Her eyes were melting, soft, abrim with tears, held bravely back. The stage was all set for Gadean trickery. But she surprised him.

"I would die for Horatius Verres! I would submit to torture for him. But not for you, Pkauchios, Simon, Balbus, Cæsar nor any other man!"

"Pearls?" Tros asked her, studying her face.

She reached for the hem of her chlamys and produced the one pearl he had already given her, holding it out in the palm of her hand.

"You may keep them! Simon may keep my money unless you find a way of freeing me to-night! I will sing no more. I will dance no more and please none but myself. For they shall bury me where the other dead slaves' bodies rot if I lose Horatius Verres. Tros of Samothrace, if you have never loved a woman —"

"Come," said Tros.

The longboat set them on the seaweed-littered beach, where an officer of Balearic slingers, apeing Roman airs and very splendid in his clanking bronze, signed to Tros to pass on, but demanded to be told by what right Simon, the Jew, paid visits to a foreign ship in harbor. A party of Simon's slaves, with his great unwieldy, paneled litter in their midst had been detained some distance off, a detachment of slingers guarding them.

Simon began to argue excitedly, gesticulating, gasping as the nervousness increased his asthma. Chloe interrupted.

"Do you know me?" she asked.

"I pass you, exquisite Chloe!" the officer answered in Latin with an atrocious Balearic accent.

"I pass Simon!" she retorted. "Do you dare to prevent me?"

"But Chloe —"

"Bring me Simon's slaves or count me your enemy!" she interrupted.

With a half-humorous grimace the officer beckoned to his men to let Simon's slaves advance.

"Remember me, O favorite of Fortune!" he said to Chloe. "My name is Metellus."

"I will mention you to Balbus. I will lie to him about your good looks and your loyalty," she promised, and motioned to Simon to climb into his litter.

"Be your memory as nimble as your wits and feet!" Metellus answered, shrugging his shoulders and signing to his men to let the party pass.

Those Balearic slingers lined along the beach were a godsend from Tros's point of view. There was a crowd of hucksters, pimps, idlers and loose women noisily protesting because the soldiers would not let them approach the shore. In the distance where the fishing boats were anchored three liburnians patrolled the waterfront and kept small boats from putting out. There was no chance of communication with the ship, no risk of the crew getting drunk or of Jaun Aksue and his Eskualdenak escaping.

All the way to the city gate the road was lined with idlers who had come to stare and touts who heralded the fame of Gades' brothels. They praised Tros's purple cloak, admired his bulk and strength, flattered, coaxed and tried to tempt him with descriptions of alleged delights, pawing at him, pulling, fighting one another, spitting and cursing at Simon's slaves for thrusting the litter through their ranks.

They offered horses, donkeys, mules, drink, women and at last a litter.

Tros hired the litter and bade Chloe climb into it and ride with him. But she refused.

"There are some things I can not do. Once I bought a litter. But it is against the law for a slave or even for freed women. The Romans' wives threatened to have me whipped. So I walk, and those women envy me my health, if nothing else!"

They were stared at by the gate guards and by the crowd that swarmed there, but not in any way molested. There was no wheeled traffic, but the narrow street was choked with burdened slaves, mules, oxen and leisured pedestrians who flowed in a colorful hot stream between the lines of stalls and booths that backed against the houses. There was a din of chaffering and a drone of flies where the fruit-and meat- and fish-shops made splurges of raw color; and there was a stench of overcrowded tenements that made Tros cough and gasp.

But people were less curious inside the city, and Chloe's presence had more effect. She walked ahead with one of Simon's slaves on either side of her, and the crowd made way, occasionally cheering, calling compliments, addressing her by name as if she were a free celebrity. One man, forcing his way through the crowd, presented her with flowers and begged her to ride in his chariot if he should win next month's quadriga race in the arena.

She nodded gaily and led on along the winding street until it widened suddenly and approached an irregular square with trees along one side of it and a statue of Balbus the Governor in the midst. On the left hand of the street, with its front toward the square, was a great white building with small, iron-barred windows and the legend S.P.Q.R. in enormous letters amid scroll work all along the coping. From the windows issued shrill, spasmodic, tortured woman's screams, increasing and increasing, until the street crowd set its teeth and some laughed nervously.

It ceased abruptly, only to begin again.

There was no passing at that point. The crowd jammed the street. Even Chloe was helpless to force a way through, and while she pushed, coaxed, pleaded, argued, a girl younger than herself rushed out of a doorway fighting frantically with the crowd that interfered with her and, falling to her knees, seized Chloe's legs.

Her face was half hidden in a shawl; Chloe pulled it back and recognized her. The girl sobbed, and as the screams from the window rose to a shrill, broken summit of inflicted agony, she burst into a torrent of stuttering words all choked with sobs, her fingers clutching Chloe's knees.

Tros rolled out of the litter, for it was useless to try to force that eight-manned object through the crowd. He touched Chloe's shoulder.

"Her mother!" she whispered. "Some informer has told Balbus of a plot. He takes her mother's testimony."

She stooped and kissed the girl, then broke away from her and, beckoning to Tros to follow, began using violence and Balbus' name to force her way through, the crowd gradually yielding.

Around the corner, on the side of the building that faced the trees, eight Roman soldiers under a decurion leaned on spears beside the stone steps that led to a wide arched entrance. Beyond them, in the shadow of the wall, eight more legionaries stood guard over a group of miserable prisoners, gibing at them when they shuddered at the screams that could be heard there even more distinctly than in the street because the stone arch of the entrance magnified the noise. Held back by a rope between the steps and the trees at the back of the square was a crowd of Romans, Spaniards, Greeks, Moors, Jews, slaves and freemen, their voices making a sea of sound that paused regularly when the screams increased.

Chloe led Tros to the steps and whispered Balbus' name to the decurion in charge, who stared at Tros

but nodded leave to enter. They fought their way into a crowded lobby, where men and women stood on tiptoe trying to see through the open courtroom door over the shoulders of two legionaries whose spears and broad backs blocked the way. There was hardly breathing room. A woman in a corner had fainted and a man was pouring water on her from a lion's mouth drinking fountain built into the wall.

Chloe kicked, shoved, imprecated, cried out Balbus' name and worked her way at last, with Tros behind her, until she touched the spears held horizontally across the door and Tros could see over her shoulder into the crowded courtroom.

The screams for the moment had ceased. On a sort of throne on a raised dais with a chair on either side of it on which the secretaries sat, was Balbus, Governor of Gades, exquisitely groomed, pale, clicking at his front teeth with a thumb-nail. He was handsome, but much darker than the average Roman;\* there were rings under his eyes, that had a bored look, as if he found it difficult to concentrate on a subject that vaguely irritated him. His crisp black hair was turning gray, although he was a comparatively young man. He looked decidedly unhealthy.

Presently he sat bolt upright and the crowded courtroom grew utterly still. When he spoke his well-trained voice had the suggestion of a sneer, and his frown was a tyrant's, impatient, exacting, final — like the corners of his mouth that tightened when his lips moved.

"I have considered the advocate's argument. It is true, it is a principle of Roman law that no injustice shall be done; but this woman is not a Roman citizen, nor is she the mother of more than one child, so she has no rights that are involved in this instance. Treason has been charged against the Senate and the Roman People, a most serious issue. This woman has refused to answer truthfully the questions put to her, although she has been accused of knowing the

\* Balbus was born in Africa.



conspirators' names. Let the torturers continue. Apply fire."

He leaned forward, elbow on his knee, and again the awful screams began to fill the stone-roofed hall. A scream from the street reëchoed them. The crowd on the wooden benches reached and craned to get a better view and the sentries in the doorway stood on tiptoe; all that Tros could see over their shoulders was a glimpse of the men who held the levers of a rack and the red glow of a charcoal brazier. There began to be a stench of burning flesh.

Chloe stepped under the spears of the sentries; one of them reached out an arm but recognized her as she turned to threaten him, grinned and nodded to her to go wherever she pleased. She disappeared into the crowd that stood in the aisle between the benches. The next Tros saw of her she was in front of the dais, looking up at Balbus, who sat motionless, chin on hand, elbow on knee, apparently not listening. The tortured woman's screams made whatever Chloe said inaudible to any one but Balbus and, perhaps, his secretaries, who, however, were at pains to appear busy with their tablets.

Balbus suddenly sat upright, raising his right hand.

"Cease!" he exclaimed in a bored voice. "There will be a short recession. Remove the witness. Let the doctor see to her. After the recession I will examine the other witnesses in turn. It is possible we may not need this one's testimony."

The witness' screams died to a sobbing moan, and there was a murmur in the courtroom. Some one cried out, "Favoritism!" At the rear of the room there were audible snickers. Ushers and sentries roared for silence and, as two men carried the victim out on a stretcher through a side door, Balbus spoke with a metallic snarl:

"I will clear the court if there are further demonstrations! This is not a spectacle, but a judicial process. A courtroom is not an arena. Let decency attend the acts of justice. The next spectator who betrays

disrespect for the dignity of Roman justice shall be soundly flogged!"

He arose and left the courtroom by a door at the rear of the dais, nodding to Chloe as he went. She seized a court official by the arm and the crowd in the aisle made way in front of them. The official, lemon-faced, his skin a mass of wrinkles, sly-eyed from experience of litigation and his long nose looking capable of infinite suspicion, beckoned to Tros. The sentries let him through and the crowd in the courtroom turned to stare as he swaggered up the aisle, his sea legs giving him a roll that showed off his purple cloak and his great bulk to advantage. With his sword in its purple scabbard and the broad gold band that bound his heavy coils of black hair he looked like a king on a visit of state and, what was more to his purpose, he knew it. They passed the torture-implements, where a Sicilian slave on his knees blew at a charcoal brazier in preparation for the next unwilling witness; the long-nosed official opened the door at the rear of the dais and Chloe, all smiles and excitement, led the way in.

"The renowned and noble Tros of Samothrace!" she exclaimed, and shut the door behind her, leaning her back against it.

Balbus looked up. He was sitting by the window of a square room lined with racks of parchments, holding toward the light a tablet, which he appeared to find immensely interesting. Tros approached him and bowed, hand on hilt.

"So you are that pirate?" said Balbus, looking keenly at him.

"That is Cæsar's view of it," Tros answered. "I had the great Pompeius' leave to come and go and to use all Roman ports, but Cæsar stole my father's ship and slew him."

"Why do you come to Gades?"

"To find a friend who shall make it safe for me to take my ship to Ostia, and there to leave the ship at anchor while I go to Rome."

“For what purpose?”

“To stir Cæsar’s enemies against him; or, it may be, to persuade his friends of the unwisdom of his course. I hope to keep him from invading Britain.”

“Who is this friend whom you propose to find in Gades?”

“Yourself, for all I know,” said Tros, spreading his shoulders and smiling. “I offer *quid pro quo*. A friend of mine may count on me for friendship.”

Balbus was silent for a long time, appearing to be studying Tros’s face, but there was a look behind his eyes as if he were revolving a dozen issues in his mind.

“You took a hostage from me!” he said suddenly.

“Aye, and a good looking one!” Tros answered. “I was fortunate. You shall have him back when I leave Gades. I am told he knows your secrets.”

“What if I hold you against him?” Balbus sneered; but he could not keep his eyes from glancing at Tros’s sword.

Tros smiled at him.

“Why, in that case, my lieutenant would take my ship to Ostia. And I wonder whether that hostage, whom he will there surrender to the Romans, will keep your secrets as stoutly as the woman in the court just now kept hers!”

Balbus glared angrily, but Tros smiled back at him, his hand remaining on his sword-hilt.

“However, why do we talk of reprisals?” Tros went on after an awkward pause. “Balbus, son of Balbus, is it wisdom to reject a friendship that the gods have brought you on a western wind?”

Balbus looked startled, but tried to conceal it. Chloe, her back to the door, took courage in her teeth and interrupted in a strained voice:

“What said Pkauchios? A red ship with a purple sail? A bold man in a purple cloak?”

“Peace, thou!” commanded Balbus, but in another second he was smiling at her. “Chloe,” he said, “you dance for me to-night?”

She nodded.

"As long as Pkauchios owns me."

Balbus stared at her, frowning:

"Pkauchios will never manumit you!" he said. "You know too many secrets."

Chloe bit her lip, as if she regretted having spoken, but her eyes were on Tros's face and appeared to be urging him to follow the cue she had given.

"Balbus, what if I should save your life?" Tros asked. "What then? Or shall I sail away and leave you?"

Again Chloe interrupted:

"Balbus! What said Pkauchios? What said the auguries? 'Death stalks you in the streets of Gades unless Fortune intervenes!'"

Balbus stared at Tros again.

"How come you to know about conspiracies in Gades?" he demanded.

"I, too, consult the auguries," said Tros. "For my ship's sake I read the stars as some men read a woman's eyes. The stars have blinked me into Gades. The very whales have beckoned me! My dreams for nine nights past in storms at sea have been of Gades and a man's life I shall save."

Balbus' lips opened a little and his lower jaw came slowly forward. He used his left hand for a shield against the sunlight streaming through the window and, leaning sidewise, peered at Tros again.

"You look like a blunt, honest seaman," he remarked, "save that you are dressed too handsomely and overbold!"

"My father was a prince of Samothrace," Tros answered; whereat Balbus shrugged his shoulders. It was no part of the policy of Roman governors to appear much thrilled by foreign titles of nobility.

Now Tros was utterly perplexed what course to take, for which reason he was careful to look confident. He knew the information he had from Chloe might be a net-work of lies. There might be no truth whatever, for instance, in her statement that Cæsar was on his way to Gades; on the other hand it might be true, and Balbus might be perfectly aware of it.

Examining Balbus' eyes, he became sure of one thing — Balbus was no idealist; a mere suggestion of an altruistic aim would merely stir the man's suspicion.

"I come to fish in troubled waters," Tros remarked. "I seek advantage in your disadvantage."

Suddenly, as if some friendly god had whispered in his ear, he thought of the Balearic slingers on the beach and how readily their officer had yielded to Chloe's arrogant support of Simon. He remembered that shrug of the shoulders when she promised to praise him to Balbus.

"Are your troops dependable?" he asked, knowing that mutiny was as perennial as the seasons wherever Roman troops were kept too long in idleness. He began to wonder whether, perhaps, Balbus had not sent for Cæsar to help him out of an emergency. Secretaries, slaves might have spread such a rumor. Chloe might have magnified it and distorted it for reasons of her own; the Gades dancing girls, he knew, were capable of any intrigue. For that matter Horatius Verres might be Balbus' spy, not Cæsar's.

But Balbus' startled stare was more or less convincing. And it dawned on Tros that a Roman governor who felt entirely sure of his own authority would not yield so complacently to that hostage trick; a man with his nerve unshaken would have countered promptly by arresting Tros himself. Balbus was worried, nervous, trying to conceal the fact. Subduing irritation, he ignored Tros's question and retorted with another —

"You used Cæsar's seal! What do you know of Cæsar's movements?"

"None except Cæsar can guess what he will do next," Tros said, trying to suggest by his expression that he knew more than he proposed to tell.

"Word came," said Balbus, "that you fought a battle with his biremes. I have heard that the druids of Gaul report to you all Cæsar's moves in advance. Can you tell me where he is now? If you tell the truth, I will do you any favor within my power."

The pupils of Tros's amber eyes contracted suddenly.



His head jerked slightly in Chloe's direction and Balbus took the hint.

"Chloe," he said, "go you to that woman who was tortured. Help to bandage her. Condole with her. Try to persuade her to confess to you the names of the conspirators who are plotting against my life. Tell her that if she confesses she shall not be tortured any more, and she may save others from the rack."

Chloe left the room, and Tros did not care to turn his head to see what effect the dismissal had on her.

"Now, what do you know of Cæsar?" Balbus asked.

Tros smiled. He was determined not to answer, until sure of where the forks of Balbus' own dilemma pricked. And the longer Tros hesitated the more confident Balbus grew that Tros knew more that he would tell without persuasion.

"You are Cæsar's enemy?" he asked.

Tros nodded.

"I am of the party of Pompeius Magnus," Balbus remarked, narrowing his eyes.

Tros nodded again.

"It would not offend Pompeius Magnus if — ah — if death should overtake Cæsar," Balbus remarked, and looked the other way.

"So I should imagine," Tros said, watching him.

Balbus stroked his chin. It had been beautifully shaven. Tros kept silence. Balbus had to resume the conversation:

"If Cæsar should visit Gades and should die, all Rome would sigh with relief; but the Senate would assert its own dignity by crucifying any Roman who had killed him. You understand me?"

Again Tros nodded. He was having hard work to suppress excitement, but his breath came regularly, slowly. Even his hand on the jeweled sword-hilt rested easily. Balbus appeared irritated at his calmness. He spoke sharply —

"But if an enemy of Cæsar slew him" — Tros passed his hand over his mouth to hide a smile — "that man would have a thousand friends in Rome!" Balbus went

on. Then, after a moment's pause, his eyes on Tros, "Cæsar's corpse could harm no friends of yours in Britain!"

For as long as thirty breaths Tros and Balbus eyed each other. Then:

"Spies have informed me," said Balbus, "of a rumor that Cæsar intends to come here. What else than that news brought you into Gades? Did you not come to waylay and kill him?"

Tros assumed the slyest possible expression.

"I should need such guarantees of safety and immunity as even Balbus might find it hard to give," he remarked.

"We can discuss that later on," said Balbus. "Cæsar moves swiftly and secretly, but I know where he was three days ago. He can not be here for four of five days yet. We have time."

However, Tros remembered his friend Simon — probably already home by now and in abject terror waiting news of the interview. Also he thought of Chloe. Those were two whose loyalty he needed to bind to himself, by all means and as soon as possible.

"I will make a first condition now," he said abruptly. "Simon, the Jew, owes money but can not pay. He says you owe him money and will not pay. Will you settle with Simon?"

Balbus looked exasperated.

"Bacchus!" he swore under his breath.

It needed small imagination to explain what situation he was in. Like any other Roman governor, he had been forced to send enormous sums to Rome to defray his own debts and to bribe the professional blackmailers who lived by accusing absentees before the Senate. He had not been long enough in Gades to accumulate reserves of extorted coin.

Tros understood the situation perfectly. He also knew how men in debt snatch eagerly at temporary respite.

"There is no haste for the money," he remarked. "Let Simon write an order on your treasury which

you accept for payment, say, in six months' time."

Balbus nodded.

"That would be an unusual concession," he said, "from a man in my position. But I see no serious objection."

"Would any one in Gades dare to refuse to accept such a document in payment of a debt?" Tros asked him.

Balbus stiffened, instantly assertive of his dignity.

"Some men will dare almost anything — once!" he remarked. "It would be a dangerous indiscretion!"

"Even if it were the price of the manumission of a slave?"

"Even so."

"Very well," said Tros. "There is a female slave in Gades whom I covet. Can you order the sale of that slave to me?"

"Not so," said Balbus. "But I can order the slave manumitted at the price at which the owner has declared that slave for taxation purposes, and provided the slave pays the manumission tax of ten per cent on her market value."

"I am at the age when a woman means more to me than money," Tros remarked.

Balbus nodded. That was no new thing. The dry smile on his face revealed that he thought he had Tros in the hollow of his hand.

"But how did you make the acquaintance of this slave in Gades?" he asked curiously.

Tros could lie on the spur of a moment as adroitly as he could change the ship's helm to defeat the freaks of an Atlantic wind.

"She was sold under my eyes in Greece, two years ago. I was outbidden," he answered promptly. "I learned she was brought to Gades and, if you must know, that is why I risked coming here. She is extremely beautiful. I saw her just now in the street."

"Do you know who owns her?"

"I will find out."

"Well," said Balbus, "make your inquiries cau-

tiously, or her owner may grow suspicious and spirit her out of sight. You would better get her name and legal description, her owner's name and her taxable value, have the document drawn and bring it to me to sign before the owner learns anything about it."

"When? Where?" Tros asked him.

Balbus turned in his chair suddenly and looked straight into Tros's face, staring long and keenly at him.

"At my house. To-night," he said deliberately, using the words with emphasis, as a man might who was naming an enormous stake in a game of chance. "I bid you to my house to supper at one hour after sunset. There is an Egyptian named Pkauchios in Gades, an astrologer of great ability in the prediction of events. For two months he has predicted daily that Cæsar will die very soon by violence. Last night, between midnight and the dawn, he came to me predicting your arrival after sunrise. He prophesied that you shall serve me in a matter of life and death. I am thinking, if it should be my life and the death of Cæsar —"

"I must consult this Pkauchios!" said Tros, and Balbus nodded.

"I will send you to him."

"No," said Tros, "for then he will know I come from you. And if he has lied to you, he will lie to me. But if I go alone I may get the truth from him. I will not slay Cæsar unless I know the elements are all propitious."

"Go to him then," Balbus answered. "Make yourself as inconspicuous in Gades as you can. Bring me an exact account to-night of all that Pkauchios has said to you. I will sign the order for Simon's money and for the manumission of that slave girl just to let you feel my generosity. Thereafter, we will discuss the terms on which you shall — ah — shall — ah — act as the instrument of fate."

## Chapter XIV

### CONSPIRACY

*Money? Aye, I need it. But has money brains, heart, virtue, intelligence, courage, faith, hope, vision? He who sets his course by money sees a false star. He who measures by it is deceived, and his measure is false wherewith he measures all else.*

From The Log of Tros of Samothrace

The litter Tros had hired had vanished when he left the courtroom. In its place was a sumptuous thing with gilded pomegranates at the corners of the curtained awning, borne by eight slaves in clean white uniform. An Alexandrian eunuch, who seemed to have enough authority to keep the crowd at bay, came forward, staff in hand, to greet Tros at the courthouse steps.

"My master the noble Pkauchios invites you," he said, bowing, gesturing toward the litter.

"Where is my own litter?" Tros demanded.

The eunuch smiled, bowing even more profoundly.

"My master would be ashamed that you should ride in such a hired thing to his house. I took the liberty in his name of dismissing it and paying the trifling charges."

Tros hesitated. He would have preferred to go first to Simon's house, supposing that the Jew had hurried home to wait for him, but as he glanced to left and right in search of Simon's litter the eunuch interpreted that thought.

"Simon the Jew is also my master's guest," he announced.

Tros disbelieved that. It was incredible that Simon should accept hospitality from a man whom he had so recently described as a vile magician. But the de-



curion in charge of the soldiers at the courthouse entrance nodded confirmation:

"Simon went to have his fatness charmed away," he suggested with a grin. "Pkauchios has a name for working miracles."

Reflecting that in any event he had better see Orwic as soon as possible, Tros rolled into the splendid litter. There was no sign of Chloe and he did not care to arouse comment by asking for her. He was borne away in haste, the soldiers shouting to the crowd to make way for the litter and, after a long ride through well-swept but fetid smelling streets, he was set down at Pkauchios' front gate, where the eunuch ushered him into the marble house, not announcing him, not entering the incense-smelling room with him, but drawing back the clashing curtains, motioning him through and closing them behind him.

He was greeted by Orwic's boyish laugh and by a gasp from Simon. The two were seated face to face on couches near the window, unable to converse since Simon knew hardly any Gaulish, and both of them as pleased to see Tros as if he were a meal produced by a miracle for hungry men. Orwic ran to greet him, threw an arm around him, trying to say everything at once in an excited whisper:

"A great wizard. This must be the man our Lord Druid might have sent you to if you had only listened — made a proposal — slip the Eskualdenak ashore — he says he knows how to manage that — hide them in a place he'll show me — kill Balbus tonight — lead an uprising against the Romans — carry the rebellion into Gaul — no need then to go to Rome — we'll keep the Romans' hands too full to invade Britain!"

Tros snorted. One sniff was enough. There was a woman smell on Orwic's clothes.

"Magic works many ways," he remarked, and then thought of the curtains behind him. "We will consider the proposal," he added in a somewhat louder voice.

He approached Simon, who appeared too exhausted to rise from the couch and, glimpsing through the open window his great ship at anchor in the distance, he paused a moment, thrilled by the sight, before he spoke in Aramaic, his lips hardly moving, in an undertone that Orwic hardly caught:

“Out of the teeth of danger we will snatch success, but you must trust me. We speak now for an unseen audience.”

He could feel the espionage, although there was no sign of it. He leaned through the open window, but no eavesdroppers lurked within earshot. He strode back to the curtains through which he had entered, jerked them back suddenly, and found the hall empty. There was another door a few feet from the throne with the arms of gilded ivory. He jerked back its curtains, too, and found the next room vacant, silent, beautifully furnished but affording no hiding place. There was a lute left lying by a gilded chair and the same smell of scented women that he had noticed on Orwic's clothes, but the wearers of the scent had vanished.

Nevertheless, he was convinced he was being spied on. He could feel the nervous tension that an unseen eye produces, and he suspected the wall at the back of the ivory throne might be hollow; the corner behind the throne was not square but built out, forming two angles and a short, flat wall. The canopy over the throne cast shadow, and there was a deal of decoration there that might conceal a peep-hole. He signed to Orwic to sit down by the window and, standing so that his voice might carry straight toward that corner wall, himself full in the sunlight, stroking his chin with an air of great deliberation, he spoke in Gaulish:

“It is good we may speak among ourselves before the Egyptian comes. What kind of man is he?”

“A nobleman!” said Orwic. “A good hater of the Romans! It was his slaves who rescued me from some ruffians in a mean street. He is not a false magician

but a true one. He had prophesied the coming of your ship, and my landing by night and being lost in Gades. He has read our destiny in the stars and he refused, like a true magician, to say a word about it until I almost forced it out of him."

Tros nodded gravely.

"Then he made me that proposal. And I tell you, Tros, you would do well to consider it."

"I am an opportunist," Tros said. "I will do whatever fortune indicates."

"I objected to murdering Balbus," Orwic went on. "But the Romans invaded Britain. They killed our men. And he said Balbus is doomed anyhow but, according to his reading of the stars, if he should be killed by the prince from a far country who steps out of the ship with the purple sails, it will mean the end of Roman rule in all Hispania and Gaul. Whereas, if he is killed by a common murderer, no good will come of it."

Tros frowned. No trace of incredulity betrayed itself as he answered solemnly —

"Few men can read the stars with such precision."

"That is exactly my opinion," Orwic agreed. "He speaks like a Lord Druid."

Simon had made very little of the conversation, but he was watching Tros's face with a sort of blank expression on his own, as if his intuition rather than his ordinary faculties were working. He had suppressed his noisy breathing.

"Get me my money. Tros! Get me my money!" he gasped suddenly, noisily in Aramaic.

But his expression had changed and his eyes were brighter; Tros interpreted the remark to mean that Simon could see light at last. He answered him in Greek, speaking very proudly.

"I will put the illustrious Pkauchios to a test, as a man throws dice to solve a difficult decision. For I think that in such ways the gods are willing to indicate a proper course to us in our perplexity. If he shall grant me the first favor that I ask, and faith-

fully perform it, then I will let him guide me in this matter. But if he shall quibble with me or refuse or, having promised, fail to do what I shall ask, then no. So, let the gods decide!"

He made a gesture as of throwing dice and turned his back to the window, striding the length of the room with measured steps. He had paced the room three times before he saw Pkauchios standing in the doorway, not the doorway near the throne — the other one.

"I welcome you. Peace to you!" said Pkauchios in Greek. "But I foresee that you must snatch peace from the fangs of war!"

"I thank you for your courtesy," Tros answered, bowing.

He did not bow so deeply that his eyes left Pkauchios' face. He hated the man instantly, and hid the hatred under a mask of eager curiosity.

The magician's dark eyes seemed to be trying to read into his very soul, but Tros knew nothing better than that men of genuine spiritual power are careful never to display the outward signs of it and, above all, never to distress strangers with a penetrating stare. The astrologer's robes and the air of superhuman wisdom were convincing, but not of what Pkauchios intended. The Egyptian spoke again pleasantly, with the air of a wiseman condescending:

"I regret I should have kept you waiting, but I observed the flight of birds, from which much may be foretold by those who understand natural symbology. Why do you come to Gades?"

"You are a magician. You should know why I came," Tros answered.

"And indeed I do know. But I see there is a question in your mind," said Pkauchios.

The pupils of the Egyptian's eyes contracted into bright dots. He made a gesture with his hand before his eyes, brushing away veils of immaterial obscurity.

"Doubt? Or desire? One blended with the other, or so it seems. You have a request to make," he went on.

"Speak then, while the vision holds me."

He had not moved. He was standing before the curtains like a dignified attendant at the door of a mystery.

"There is a slave," said Tros, "who at great risk brought me information. Speak for me to Balbus that he manumit that slave."

"I will," said Pkauchios, without a second's hesitation. "Whose is the slave?"

"Do you or do you not see that the slave should be set free?" Tros countered.

"I see it is just and can be accomplished. But how shall I urge Balbus unless I know the slave's name and his master's?" Pkauchios answered.

"Speak to him thus — " said Tros. "It would be well if you should order manumitted whichever slave Tros the Samothracian indicates."

"It shall be done," said Pkauchios. But he did not quite retain his self-command. There was a twitching of the face muscles, a discernible effort to conceal chagrin.

Tros did not dare to glance at Simon or at Orwic. He was so sure now that the Egyptian had been spying through an eye-hole in the wall behind the throne, that he would have burst out laughing if he had not bowed again and backed away, biting his lower lip until the blood came. That gave him an excuse to break the tension.

"Blood?" he exclaimed, frowning, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand and examining it.

"Aye, blood!" said Pkauchios in a hollow voice and walked in front of him to near where Orwic sat.

By the window he turned and, after greeting Simon with a stare and a gesture of condescension, spoke again:

"Blood! Mars with Saturn in conjunction! And a red ship on the morning tide! The blood must flow in rivers-full! But whose?"

He stared at Simon balefully until the Jew in nervous resentment gaped at him and tried to force him-



self to speak, but failed because the asthma gripped his throat.

"I know your danger!" Pkauchios remarked. "There are weapons in your warehouse —"

"Yours!" Simon interrupted, pointing a fat finger at him. "You —"

The Egyptian cut him short.

"Jew! Have a care! You come to me for help, not for recrimination. At a word from me you would be tortured with the rack and charcoal. Rob not opportunity!"

Tros kept staring through the window at his great ship in the distance. She summoned to the surface all the mysticism in him and he muttered lines from Homer as he gazed. The blind poet who once dwelt on rocky Chios, when he stamped on to the racial memory that character of crafty, bold Odysseus, hymned a hero after Tros's own heart. The Egyptian seemed to read the tenor of his thought.

"Tros of Samothrace," he said, turning his back on Simon, "you have impelled yourself into a vortex of events. You — your ship — your friends — your crew — are all in danger. Win or lose all! Forward lies the only road to safety!"

"It appears you have a plan," said Tros. "Unfold it."

The Egyptian nodded.

"We are few who can interpret destiny, but to us is always given means with which to guide events. I have awaited you these many days."

"I am here," said Tros.

"And you have men with you! You will sup to-night with Balbus; that I know, for I advised him to invite you. Listen. There is a quarry close to Balbus' house where you can hide your men. There is a wall between the quarry and the house, where no guards are ever posted. It is easy to scale that wall from the side of the quarry. It is simple to bring unarmed slaves into the city. It is easy to bribe Balearic slingers

to see and to say nothing after darkness has set in. There are weapons in Simon's warehouse. There is only a small guard at Balbus' house at night — not more than twenty or thirty men. You have, I think, two hundred and fifty men who could hide in the quarry and at a signal overwhelm the guard."

Simon was growing restless, trying to catch Tros's eye and warn him against being caught in any such network of intrigue, but Tros trod on his foot to signal to him to keep still. Orwic, who knew no Greek, was walking about the room examining strange ornaments. The Egyptian after a pause continued:

"Balbus, who envies Cæsar, has sent emissaries into Gaul to murder him! Hourly he awaits the news of Cæsar's death! The stars, whose symbolism never lies, inform me that Cæsar is already dead, and the news will reach Gades to-night! But if Balbus lives, he will blame others for the murdering of Cæsar. Therefore, Balbus shall die, too!"

Tros nodded. Not a gesture, not a line of his face suggested that he knew it was the Egyptian himself who had sent slaves to murder Cæsar. His lion's eyes were glowing with what might have been enthusiasm. He stood, hands clenched behind him, making no audible comment.

"It is expedient that Balbus shall die to-night," said Pkauchios. "He has received word of a conspiracy against him. Sooner or later a witness in the agony of torture will reveal names. The conspirators are fearful; they lack leadership. But if Balbus were slain, the whole city would rise in rebellion! I have a plan that at the proper moment will draw away the legionaries from the camp outside the city."

He paused, and then dramatically raised his voice:

"By morning messengers will have gone forth summoning all Hispania to rise. Good leadership — and I, Pkauchios, will guide you, Tros of Samothrace — good, ruthless leadership! Hispania and Gaul will throw off Roman rule!"

Tros grinned. He had made his mind up which is a difficult thing to do in the teeth of an expert in personal magnetism. He succeeded in convincing even Simon.

"Well and good," he said, folding his arms. "But I will not kill Balbus until he has set that slave free and has repaid Simon what he owes."

"Those two preliminaries granted?" said the Egyptian.

He seemed quite sure that Tros had committed himself.

"Orwic shall smuggle my men into the city if you show him how," said Tros, "and at the proper signal. But who shall give the signal?" he asked.

He was wary of definite lying. Any promises he made he liked to keep. But he had no objection to the Egyptian's deceiving himself.

"I will give the signal," Pkauchios answered. "Let brazen trumpets peal the death of Balbus! Six trumpets shall clamor a fanfare on the porch. Then plunge your dagger in!"

"Where will you be?" Tros asked him.

"At the banquet. Where else? Behold me. I rise from the banqueting couch. I stand thus to announce an augury. My servant, squatting by the door, will watch me, and when I raise my right hand thus, he will pass out to the porch where the trumpeters will be waiting who are to make music for the midnight dance Chloe has invented. The fanfare resounds. Your men come swarming over the quarry wall. Your dagger does its work — and — and you may help yourself, if you wish, from Balbus' treasury!"

Tros acted so immensely pleased that Orwic came and wondered at him. Simon hove himself off the couch at last and clutched Tros's arm.

"Tros, Tros!" he gasped. "Don't do this dog's work! Don't! You will ruin all of us!"

Scowling, Pkauchios opened his thin lips to rebuke and threaten the Jew, but checked himself as he saw the expression on Tros's face. Tros took

Simon by the arms, driving his fingers into the fat biceps, the only signal that he dared give that his words need not be taken at face value.

"Simon!" he exclaimed in a voice of stern reproach. "You owe me money! Yet you dare to keep me from this golden opportunity? Fie on you, Simon!"

Simon wrung his hands. Tros turned to Orwic.

"Go you to the ship," he said. "Our friend here, the Egyptian, will provide you a guide to the beach. Talk with Jaun Aksue. Tell him all the Eskualdenak shall come ashore to-night under your leadership, and do a little business of mine before I turn them loose to amuse themselves. Say they shall be well paid. Make them understand they must be sober until midnight. I will come to the ship later and explain the details of the plan. Go swiftly."

## Chapter XV

### THE COMMITTEE OF NINETEEN

*I am not wise. I seek wisdom. But I know this: tyranny is never slain by slaying tyrants. Let valiance first slay tyranny in its victims' hearts. Tyrants then will die of being laughed at, quicker than any hangman could make an end of them.*

*But a man must begin at beginnings. I have not yet learned to laugh at tyranny. I hate it.*

From the Log of Tros of Samothrace

It approached high noon. Simon had left an hour ago in a sort of wet-hen flutter of indignant misery, with a threat from the Egyptian in his ear:

"Jew! Balbus owes you money. He would welcome excuse to proscribe you and seize your property! One word from me —"

Thereafter Pkauchios held Tros in conversation,

seeking to make sure of him, promising him riches should the night's attempt succeed and more than riches, "power, which is the rightful perquisite of honest men!" Too shrewd to threaten, he nevertheless dropped hints of what might happen if Tros should fail him.

"You are not the first. Man after man I have tested. One fool tried to betray me, and was crucified. My word with Balbus outweighed his! Another thought he could do without me, after I had made all ready for him. Those he would have led to insurrection burned his house and threw him back into the flames as he ran forth in his night clothes. No, no, you are not the first!"

"I am the last!" Tros answered grimly, and Pkauchios' dark eyes took on a look of satisfaction. Then Tros tried to find out where Chloe was without arousing Pkauchios' suspicion.

"Who was that woman," he asked, "who came out to my ship?"

"Oh, a mischievous Greek slave. A very clever dancer who will perform to-night for Balbus."

"Trustworthy?" Tros suggested.

"No Gades dancing girls are trustworthy. Theirs is the very religion of intrigue."

"*Ergastulum?*" Tros suggested.

"No. She sleeps to be ready for to-night."

However, there was plainly a mask over Pkauchios' thought. Tros was quite sure he was lying, equally sure he was worried. All sorts of fears presented themselves that Tros was hard put to it to keep from showing on his face. Chloe might have disappeared, turned traitress. He decided he was a fool to have left Horatius Verres at large on the ship. If Chloe loved that spy of Cæsar's — or was he Balbus' spy, pretending to be Cæsar's? — then she would quite likely do whatever Verres told her and perhaps betray every one, Pkauchios included.

Yet he decided not to return to the ship until he had spoken alone with Simon. The old Jew



was possibly the weakest link in the intrigue. In terror he might run to Balbus and betray the whole plot. Before all else he must reassure Simon.

Pkauchios ordered out the litter with the eunuch in attendance and the eight white-liveried slaves. Tros saw him whisper to the eunuch, but pretended not to see. He had contrived to look entirely confident when the Egyptian walked with him to the garden gate.

"After sunset," said Pkauchios, "there will go a messenger to the gate guards who will bid them admit two hundred and fifty slaves on the excuse that they are needed as torchbearers for the midnight pageant in Balbus' garden. They will be shown a writing to that effect which the fools will think is genuine. Another messenger will go to the Balearic guards who line the beach. And he will take money with him, a considerable bribe. At sunset a great barge will be rowed alongside your ship. Put your men into that. They shall be led to Simon's warehouse where they may help themselves to weapons. And the same guide will lead them afterward to the quarry outside Balbus' garden. He will lead them by roundabout ways so as not to attract attention."

Tros rolled into the litter and allowed the eunuch to lead as if his first objective were the ship. But he had no intention of being spied on by that eunuch, and when the litter halted at a narrow passage in the street to let three laden mules go by he rolled out of it again.

"Wait for me by the city gate," he commanded.

The eunuch demurred, tried persuasion, offered to carry him anywhere, and at last grew impudent.

"You insult my master's hospitality!"

A crowd began to gather, marveling at Tros's purple cloak and at the broad gold band across his forehead. The eunuch tried to drive them away, fussily indignant, prodding with his staff at those who seemed least likely to retaliate, but the crowd increased. Tros felt a tug at his cloak and, glancing

swiftly, caught his breath. He saw Conops slip out of the crowd and go sauntering along the street! His red cap was at a reckless angle and his bandy legs suggested the idle, erratic, goalless meandering of a sailor in a half-familiar port.

Tros climbed back into the litter promptly as the best means of escaping from the crowd. Conops, faithful little rascal, would never have left the ship without good reason. Clearly he expected to be followed. The eunuch contrived to clear the way and the crowd dispersed about its business, which was mainly to sit in doorway shadows. As the litter began to overtake Conops he increased his pace until, where five streets met, he turned up an alley and turned about to watch. He made no signal.

Making sure that Conops was not following the litter downhill toward the city gate, Tros vaulted to the ground and had made his way to the alley mouth before the eunuch, walking rapidly ahead to clear the way, realized what was happening.

"This way, master — swiftly!"

Conops opened a door ten paces down the alley and Tros followed through it. The door slammed behind him and in stifling gloom he was greeted by a laugh he thought he recognized. It was nearly a minute before definite objects began to evolve out of shadows. He could hear a rasping cough that seemed familiar, and there were other noises that suggested the presence of armed men, but the sunlight had been dazzling on the whitewashed walls and there were no open windows in the place in which he found himself. It took time for eyesight to readjust itself. The first shape to evolve out of the darkness was a stairhead, leading downward; then, down the stairs a leather curtain of the rich old-golden hue peculiar to Hispania. Above the curtain, on a panel of the wall the stairway pierced, was a painted picture of a bull's head, and there was something strange about its eyes. After a moment's stare Tros decided there were human eyes watching him through slits in the painted

ones. There was a murmur of voices from behind the curtain and, every moment or two, that sound of labored breathing and a cough that resembled Simon's.

Conops was in no haste to explain. He slunk behind Tros in the darkness, and a man stepped between them in response to a thundering on the street door. He opened a peep-hole and spoke through it to Pkauchios' eunuch; Tros could see him clearly as the light through the hole shone on his face — a lean, intelligent, distinguished looking man. He assured the eunuch in good Greek that he was mistaken. None had entered the house recently. Perhaps the next house or the one over the way. Finally, he advised the eunuch to wait patiently.

"People who vanish usually reappear unless the guards have seized them. Private business or perhaps a woman, who knows? At any rate, I will trouble you not to disturb a peaceful household. Go away!"

He closed the peep-hole and in the darkness Tros could sense rather than see that he bowed with peculiar dignity.

"Do me the favor to come this way," he murmured, using the Roman language in as gentle a voice as Tros had ever heard.

He led down the dark stairs as if they were not quite familiar to him.

Tros groped for Conops, seized him by the neck and swung him face to face.

"Well?" he demanded.

Conops answered in a hurried whisper:

"That fellow Horatius Verres came out of the hold and said 'If you value your master's freedom, follow me!' Then he jumped overboard and swam. I followed to the beach in a boat. All the way to this place he kept a few paces ahead of me. Then he said 'Find your master and bring him here, or he'll be dead by midnight!' I was on my way to Pkauchios' house when —"

"Go ahead of me!" Tros ordered.

He loosed his sword in the scabbard and trod

quietly, hoping Conops' heavier step would be mistaken for his own in the event of ambush, so leaving himself free to fight. But the curtain was drawn aside, only to reveal a dim lamp and another curtain. The sound of men's voices increased; there was now laughter and a smell of wine. Beyond the second curtain was a third with figures on it done in blue and white. Some one pulled the third curtain aside and revealed a great square room whose heavy beams were set below the level of the street. The walls were of stone, irregularly dressed. There was a tiled floor covered with goat-hair matting, and a small table near one end of the room, at which a man sat with his back to a closed door. Around the other walls were benches occupied by men in Roman and Greek costume, although none of them apparently was Roman and by no means all were Greeks. There were two Jews, for instance, of whom one was Simon. All except Simon rose as Tros entered. Simon seemed exhausted, and was sweating freely from the heat of the bronze illuminating lamps.

"The noble Tros of Samothrace!" said the man with the gentle voice who had led the way downstairs.

Tros glared around him, splendid in his purple cloak against the golden leather curtain, and the man at the table bowed. Simon coughed and made movements with his hands, suggesting helplessness. He who had led the way downstairs produced a chair made of wood and whaleskin and with the air of a courtier offered it to Tros to sit on, but he pretended not to notice it.

"Illustrious Tros of Samothrace, we invite you to be seated," said the man at the table.

He looked almost like Balbus, except that his face was harder and not wearied from debauch of the emotions. He had humor in his dark eyes, and every gesture, every curve of him suggested confidence and good breeding.

Tros noticed that Horatius Verres was seated in

the darkest corner of the room, that Conops' knife-blade was a good two inches out of the sheath, that his own sword was at the proper angle to be drawn instantly, and that the men nearest to him looked neither murderous nor capable of preventing his escape past the curtain.

"Illustrious Tros of Samothrace," said the man at the table, "we have learned that you will lend your dagger to the cause of Gades."

"Who are you?" Tros retorted bluntly.

"We are a committee of public safety, self-appointed and here gathered, unknown to our Roman rulers, for the purpose of conspiracy in the name of freedom," he at the table answered. "My own name is Quintilian."

Tros heard a noise behind the curtain, was aware of armed men on the stairs. By the half smile on the chairman's face he realized he was in a trap from which there was no chance of escape without a miracle of swordsmanship or else a shift of luck. He stared very hard at Simon, who seemed to avoid his gaze.

"We wish to assure ourselves," said the man who had called himself Quintilian, "that we have not been misinformed."

"There are two who might have told you," Tros answered. "One is Simon, the other Chloe, a Greek slave. I will say nothing unless you tell me which of them betrayed me."

Quintilian smiled. His dark, amused eyes glanced around the room, resting at last on Simon's face.

"Your friend Simon," he said, "has refused to answer questions. We are pleased that your arrival on the scene may save him from that application to his person of inducements to speak, which we had in contemplation."

Tros blew a sigh out of his lungs, half of admiration for his old friend Simon, half of contempt for himself for having trusted Chloe. Then he glared at Horatius Verres over in the corner.



"How came I to trust you?" he wondered aloud.

"I don't know," the Roman answered, smiling. "I myself marveled at it. I am greatly in your debt, illustrious Tros. You gave me opportunity to hold a long conversation with Herod ben Mordecai down in the dark, in the hold of your ship. And you left me free to watch for signals from the shore. You knew that Chloe loves me. I am sure you are much too wise to suppose that a woman in love would neglect to signal to her lover." The voice was mocking, confident, cynical.

Tros tossed his head as if about to speak, staring straight at the man at the table to conceal his intention of charging up the stairs and fighting his way to the street. Up anchor and away from Gades — there was nothing else to do! The only thing that made him hesitate was wondering how to rescue Simon.

"You are in no danger at present. Be seated," said Quintilian courteously. "We wish to hear from your lips confirmation of a plot that interests us deeply. We also are conspirators."

Tros closed his mouth grimly.

He did not sit down, but laid his left hand on the chair-back, intending to use the chair as a shield when he judged the moment ripe.

"Ah, you have not understood us properly," said Quintilian. "Trouble yourself to observe that we are not warlike men, not even armed with anything but daggers. We are students of philosophy, of music, of the sacred sciences. Our purpose is, that Gades shall become a center of the arts, a city dedicated to the Muses. We have heard that Pkauchios the Egyptian plans an uprising which you will lead by slaying Balbus, for whom none of us has any particular admiration. In the interests of Gades we propose to discover in what way we can be of assistance to you."

Tros let a laugh explode in one gruff bark of irony.

"I am no friend of Balbus. I am the enemy of Cæsar and of Rome," he answered. "But if I were so far to forget my manhood as to cut a throat like a

common murderer, it would be the throat of Pkauchios! You fools!"

"Not so foolish, possibly, as weak!" Quintilian answered with a suave smile. "But as the poet Homer says, 'The strength even of weak men when united avails much!'"

The mention of the poet Homer mollified Tros instantly. He began to feel a sort of friendly condescension. These were harmless, poet-loving people after all. They might be saved from indiscretion.

"Fools, I said! But I, too, have been foolish. I thought to pluck my own advantage from the whirlpool of this city's frenzy! Murder never overthrew a tyranny. Ye are like dogs who bite the stick that whips them instead of fighting foot and fang against the tyranny itself! Slay Balbus, and a tyrant ten times worse will take advantage of the crime to chain a new yoke on your necks!"

There was a murmur of surprise. Quintilian raised his eyebrows and, leaning both elbows on the table, answered —

"But we know for a fact you have agreed with Pkauchios to stab Balbus in his house at the supper — to-night."

"Chloe told you. Well, I, too, was fool enough to trust her, but not altogether," Tros said, grimly. "I would not trust Pkauchios if I had him tied and gagged! My plan was nothing but to rescue Balbus, to protect him, and so win his gratitude! I seek a favor from him. Bah! Do you think I would lend my men for a purpose that would bring disaster on a city against which I have no grudge? *Phaugh!* Murder your own despots, if you will, but count me out of it! Look you —"

He drew his sword and shook the cloak back from his shoulder. Behind him he heard the click of Conops' knife emerging from the sheath.

"I go!" He took a stride toward the door, but as none moved to prevent him he paused and faced Quintilian again. He decided to test them to the

utmost. If he had to fight his way out he proposed to know it. "Simon may come if he will. I have two words of advice for you: Kill me if you can before I gut your men who guard the stairs, because I go to Balbus! I will warn him, for the sake of Gades! Fools! If you must murder some one, make it Pkauchios! If that dark trickster has his way, all Hispania and Gaul will run blood! You have let the Romans in and now you must endure the Romans! Make no worse evil for yourselves than is imposed already!"

He beckoned to Simon, but Quintilian rose and bowed with such dignity and obvious good-will that Tros paused again.

"Illustrious Tros," Quintilian said, "if you could favor us with any sort of guarantee that those are your genuine sentiments, we would even let you go to Balbus! It is just Balbus' death that we hope to prevent!"

Smiling, his dark eyes alight with amusement and with something strong and generous behind that, he struck the table sharply with the flat of his hand. There was a sudden sound behind Tros's back; the inner curtain had been drawn, in the opening stood two men armed with javelins, and there was a third behind them with a bow and arrows.

"You may live and we will turn you loose if you will convince us," remarked Quintilian. "Time presses. Won't you do us the favor to be seated?"

But Tros refused to sit.

"It is you who must convince me!" he retorted.

With his cloak, his sword, the whaleskin chair and Conops to create diversions, he knew himself able to defeat javelins and bow and arrow, but he was interested to discover whether there were any more armed men in hiding. Quintilian, however, gave him no enlightenment on that point beyond continuing to smile with utmost confidence.

"You see," he said, "none of us can go to Balbus, who is altogether too suspicious. He would have us crucified for knowing anything about conspiracies.

Yet we have suffered so much in pocket and peace and dignity from former abortive risings that we ventured to take liberties with you in order to nip a new one in the bud, or rather, to prevent its budding. Balbus and his troops would nip!"

"Then his troops aren't mutinous?" Tros asked.

Quintilian smiled.

"They are always mutinous. Just now they talk of marching to join Cæsar in Gaul. But a chance to loot the city would restore them to sweet reasonableness, as Balbus perfectly understands. Illustrious Tros, perhaps we might not feel so determined if we liked Pkauchios or if we thought the city were united. We believe ourselves sufficiently intelligent to take advantage of the disaffection in the Roman camp. The moment might be ripe for insurrection but for one important fact: We have learned that Julius Cæsar is coming!"

He glanced at Horatius Verres, who smiled at Tros and nodded with the same air of amused confidence that he had displayed from the beginning.

"Speak to him," said Quintilian. So Horatius Verres stood up, arms folded, and in a very pleasant voice explained how he came to be there.

"Illustrious Tros," he said, "I am in a worse predicament than you, I being Cæsar's man, and you your own. I obey Cæsar, because I love him. While I live, I serve him at my own risk, whereas you are free to follow inclination. I discovered a plot to murder Cæsar. It was launched in Gades, and I sent him warning as soon as I knew.

"I received a reply that he will come here. But though he is Cæsar, he can not be here for several days, whether he come by land or water. I can not warn Balbus, who is touchy about being spied on and would have my head cut off to keep me from telling Cæsar things I know. But it is not Cæsar's desire that Balbus should meet death, there being virtues, of a sort which Balbus imitates, that might serve Cæsar's ends to great advantage.

"From Herod, the Jew, in the darkness of the hold of your ship, I learned of these distinguished Gadeans, who call themselves a committee of public safety. So I risked my life by coming to them, and I risked yours equally, by persuading your man Conops to summon you, believing you to be a man who might see humor in the situation and take the right way out of it."

He sat down again.

"May the gods behold your impudence!" said Tros. But he could not help liking the man.

"We know," said Quintilian, "that Pkauchios has ruffians ready to attack Balbus' house at midnight. We also know that he has bribed some of the body-guard, and we suppose he will make some of the others drunk with drugged wine. We imagine he has offered you inducements to bring a few hundred men ashore —"

"You had that from Chloe," said Tros, but Quintilian took no notice of the interruption.

"— to give backbone, as it were, to the mob that might otherwise flinch. And we know there are weapons in Simon's warehouse, some of which we presume are to be supplied to your men. We ourselves might kill Pkauchios, but Balbus has a great regard for him and, strange though it may appear, though public-spirited, we prefer not to be tortured and we object to having our possessions confiscated. Nevertheless, we will not permit Balbus to be slain and if you are willing to protect him for the sake of Gades—"

He paused and Tros waited, almost breathlessly. In his mind he made a bargain, named the terms of it by which he would abide for good or ill — a final test of these men's honesty.

"We will offer you our silent gratitude," Quintilian went on, "and we will take a pledge from you not to reveal our names or our identity to Balbus."

It was a tactful way of saying they would not murder him if he succeeded and provided he should



keep his mouth shut. Tros laughed.

"If you had offered me a price," he said, "I would have spat on you."

"As it is, are you willing to betray Pkauchios to Balbus?" Quintilian asked. "You could do it without risk whereas we —"

Tros snorted.

Quintilian smiled with a peculiar, alert, attractive wrinkling of his face and glanced around the room. Men nodded to him, one by one.

"Had you agreed to betray Pkauchios, we would have known you would betray us!" he said. "Illustrious Tros, what help can we afford you? We are nineteen men."

"See that Cæsar doesn't catch me when he comes!" Tros announced. "Keep me informed of the news of his movements." He looked hard at Horatius Verres. "You," he said, "will you keep me informed? Your Cæsar is my enemy, but I befriended you."

"I know no more than I have told you," Verres answered.

Once again Tros hesitated. Impulse, sense of danger urged him to escape while it was possible. It would be easy to make these men believe he would go forward with the plan, then to return to his ship ostensibly to instruct his own men for the night's adventure. Orwic was on board. He could sail away and leave Gades to stew in its own intrigues.

But obstinacy urged the other way. He hated to withdraw from anything he had set his hand to before the goal was reached. And again he remembered the Lord Druid's admonition, "Out of the midst of danger thou shalt snatch the keys of safety!"

While he hesitated, the door behind Quintilian opened. He recognized the hand before the woman came through, knew it was Chloe without looking at her, looked, and knew she held the keys of the whole situation. There was triumph in her eyes, although she drooped them modestly and stood beside Quintilian's table with hands clasped in an atti-

tude of reverence for the august assembly.

"Speak!" Quintilian commanded, and she looked at Tros, her eyes alight with impudence.

"Lord Tros," she said, "would you have come here of your own accord? Would you have come, had I invited you? Would you not have sailed away, if you had known these noblemen would kill you rather than permit you to kill Balbus? And do you think I propose to lose those pearls you promised me, or my freedom?"

She nodded and smiled.

"Do you think I intend to be tortured?"

There was a long pause, during which everybody in the room, Quintilian included, looked uncomfortable. Then she answered the thought that was making Tros's amber eyes look puzzled:

"These noblemen don't kill me because they know there are others who know where I am, who would go straight to Balbus and name names. It would deeply interest Balbus to learn of a committee of nineteen who propose to direct the destiny of Gades unbeknown to him! It was not I who told these nobles of your plot with Pkauchios. There is one of this committee — illustrious Quintilian, shall I name him?"

Quintilian shook his head.

"There is one in this room who pretends to be Pkauchios' friend and whom Pkauchios trusts. It was he who told. To save your life I signaled to the ship, and when Horatius Verres hurried through the streets I whispered to him so that he knew where to come."

"Who told him to persuade Conops to come?" Tros demanded, not more than half believing her. But Verres himself answered that question:

"Cæsar does not select agents who are wholly without wits," he remarked in his amused voice. "Chloe signaled, which she would not have done if all went well. Suspecting that you might be causing her trouble I proposed to myself to bring a hostage with

me, whose danger might bring you to reason. I had observed that you value your man Conops. So I hinted to him that your life was in danger, and of course he followed me, being a good faithful dog. Chloe reached this place ahead of us, and when she whispered to me again through the hole in the door, I sent Conops to find you. Is the mystery explained?"

"You are a very shrewd man," Tros answered. "But why did you tell these noblemen that Cæsar is on the way?"

"To confirm them in their resolution not to let Balbus be slain. It might not suit Cæsar to find Gades in rebellion. You see, this is not his province and it is not certain what the troops would do. If he should assume command here, it might stir Pompey to go before the Senate and demand Cæsar's indictment and recall to Rome."

All the while Verres was speaking Chloe whispered to Quintilian. Her hand was on his arm and she was urging him. Suddenly Quintilian sat upright and rapped with his hand on the table.

"Time presses," he said. "Comrades, we must come to a decision. Shall we trust the illustrious Tros and take a pledge from him?"

There was a murmur of assent.

"A pledge?" said Tros. "From me?"

"Why, yes!" said Chloe. "We think you are an honorable man, but at a word from you to Balbus we might all be crucified!"

The men in the doorway behind Tros rattled their weapons.

"We all risk our lives if we give you liberty," Quintilian remarked. "You are a stranger to us."

Tros began to turn over in his mind what pledge he could deposit with them. There was no alternative except to fight his way out to the street, and he suspected now that there were more than three men on the stairs. Quintilian enlightened him:

"You would have seven men to fight, besides ourselves. But why fight? Why not leave your faithful follower with us?"

Conops drew breath sharply. Tros turned his head to glance at him.

"Little man," he said, "shall we fight?"

"Nay, there are too many," Conops answered.

For a fraction of a second Conops' face wore the reproachful look of a deserted dog's. But he saw Tros's eyes and recognized the resolution in them. Never, in all their long experience together, had Tros looked like that at him and failed.

"You are not such a fool as you look!" Conops sneered, staring straight at Quintilian. "My master would lose his own life rather than desert a faithful servant. Harm me if you dare, and see what happens!"

At a sign from Quintilian everybody in the room rose, making a rutching of feet and a squeal of moved benches. Only Tros heard Conops' whisper:

"Now they will trust you! It was I who led you into this trap. Leave me and sail away. The worst they'll do is kill me."

For answer Tros grinned at him, grinned and nodded, clapped him on the back.

## Chapter XVI

### AT SIMON'S HOUSE

*What money is, I know not. But concerning its lending, I know this: that if I lend not with it courage, sympathy and vision I but burden a man already burdened with his own need.*

*Give, then, and forget. Or else lend heart and money — aye, money and a gale of good-will to blow it to good use.*

From The Log of Tros of Samothrace

Tros watched Conops led away through the door by which Chloe had entered, and then beckoned to Horatius Verres.

"Roman," he said, "you have risked my life for Cæsar's sake. Now the wind shifts. Lean the other way and serve me or, by all the gods, you shall not live to mock my downfall!"

"I serve Cæsar!" Verres answered.

"I also, by the irony of fate!"

Tros took him by the shoulder.

"My father, Perseus, Prince of Samothrace, tortured to his death by Cæsar's executioners, told me with his dying breath that I should live to serve that robber of man's liberties, whose enemy I am! I see I must."

"Serve well!" said Verres. "Cæsar values good-will higher than the deed."

"I bear him ill-will, but I will not be his murderer," Tros answered. "In fair fight, yes. In treachery I have no willing hand."

"I believe you," said Verres, and nodded.

"Then tell me, when is Cæsar coming?"

"I don't know," Verres answered. "If I did know, I might lie to you. Since I don't know, I tell you the plain truth."

"You know that Pkauchios has prophesied the death of Cæsar. Do you know that he expects the news of Cæsar's death to-night?" Tros asked him.

Verres nodded.

"Do you know by what means he expects the news?"

"By a slave, I suppose. He sent murderers to Gaul. Doubtless he has reckoned up the days, hours, minutes and awaits a messenger."

Tros gripped him again by the shoulder.

"Get you a disguise," he said. "To-night, near midnight, creep into Balbus' garden and send word to Pkauchios by one of Balbus' slaves that a messenger has come from Gaul who wishes word with him. When Pkauchios comes to you, whisper to him from the darkness, 'Cæsar is dead!' Then Pkauchios will return into the house and make the signal to me to



slay Balbus. But instead, when the trumpets sound, my men will rush into the house and protect him from Pkauchios' rabble."

"There will be more than rabble," Verres answered. "Pkauchios has bribed some of the Roman guard. I know that, for I know where some of them have spent the money and I have heard that they boast how they will excuse themselves by saying that Balbus plotted against Rome. I think you will have a hard time to save Balbus' life. Yet if you warn him, he will only suspect you and throw you in prison. Cæsar understands good-will. Balbus only understands a fact that he can see with his two eyes, feel with his two hands, bite with his teeth and then turn promptly into an advantage for himself. I think that even should you save his life, he will turn on you afterward."

"I will cross that bridge when the time comes," Tros replied. "Will you whisper that word to Pkauchios?"

"Yes. I can lie to him circumstantially. I know the names of the murderers he sent to Gaul."

Tros wasted no more time on him, knew he must trust him whether he wished to or not, dismissed him with a gesture, beckoned Chloe. She laughed in his face confidently yet not without wistfulness.

"Now we are all committed," she said, "and all depends on you! We die unless you win for us all to-night!"

It was her action that restored Tros's trust in her. She slipped a phial into his hand, a tiny thing not bigger than a joint of her own finger.

"Three drops from that are enough," she remarked. "It is swifter than crucifixion or being butchered at the games!"

"I go to Simon's house," Tros answered, pocketing the phial. He understood enough of the Samothracian teachings to despise the thought of suicide, but he did not propose to chill her friendliness by refusing such proof of it. "Go you to Pkauchios' eunuch. Lie to him as to where I am. Invent your own tale. Bid him

look for me at Simon's house. Then go back to your master Pkauchios and tell a likely tale to him."

She nodded and vanished through the same door through which they had taken Conops.

"Simon, old friend, we squander time like men asleep!" said Tros. "Where waits your litter? Will it hold the two of us?"

Simon rose to his feet, but he was numb, dumb, stupid with the fear that made him tremble and contracted all the muscles of his throat until his breath came like the rasping of a saw-mill. He gestured helplessly, but no words passed his lips, though he tried as he leaned on Tros's shoulder. Quintilian approached to reassure them both:

"We nineteen and the few we keep in our employ are not ingrates," he said. "Balbus tortured one of our people all day yesterday. He betrayed no one. We will protect you in all ways possible."

Quintilian led Tros and Simon out by tunnels and devious passages to a walled yard where Simon's litter waited; there he told off four men to follow the litter secretly as far as Simon's house, where they approached by a back street so as not to be seen by Pkauchios' eunuch.

It was an almost typically eastern house — all squalor on the outside, with windowless walls and doors a foot thick, fit to be defended against anything less than Roman battering-rams. The plaster on the walls was peeling off; there was no paint, nothing except size to offset the appearance of mean shabbiness. But within was splendor.

The door in the wall of the back street opened on a tiled court, with a fountain and exotic trees in carved stone Grecian pots. A Jewish major domo marshaled half a dozen slaves, who set chairs and a table beneath potted palms. More slaves brought cooling drinks and light refreshment. Simon in the guise of host began to throw off some of the paralysis of fear; in his own house he was master and the evidence of wealth around him counteracted the terror of debt

and the anguish of unsecured loans, made to powerful, slow-paying creditors.

"Write two bills on Balbus' treasury," said Tros, "one for two hundred and twenty thousand sesterces, the other for whatever balance Balbus owes you."

Simon wrote, his hand trembling and, signing, gave the bills to Tros.

"Tros, Tros," he said, "I rue the day I ever came to Gades! It was bad enough in Alexandria, where Ptolemy the Piper borrowed from the Romans and taxed us Alexandrians to death to pay the interest. But Ptolemy was human and knew men must live. We all lived well in Alexandria. Yey! These Balbuses and Cæsars think of nothing but themselves and their ambition!"

Tros clapped him on the back, his mind on pearls he had on board the ship. There was market for enough of them in Gades to relieve all Simon's difficulties. Yet the druids had not given them to him to provide relief for slave-trading Jews. It was bad enough to have to give a dozen of them to a dancing girl. Simon, his mind groping for new hope, detected something masked under Tros's air of reckless reassurance.

"Tros," he said, "haven't you a cargo on your ship, some tin or something with which we two could turn a profit? Better that than running risks with Balbus! *Stchnyarrh!* That Roman would kill us both, for having talked with the committee of nineteen, rather than pay those orders on his treasury! Any excuse would serve him! Spies may have seen us. Safer to go to him straight away, denounce Pkauchios and beg a trading-favor from him as reward! That's it! That's it! Beg leave to take a shipload of my slaves to Ostia! Then I can draw money against them here in Gades—"

Tros interrupted with another shoulder slap. That panic mood of Simon's had to be cured at all costs, druids or no druids. But he was cautious.

"Simon, I have assets in reserve. If I should fail tonight to coax your money out of Balbus for you, I will loan you enough to tide you over."

"Ah! But the Roman wolf is crafty! What if Balbus learns of this conspiracy too soon and sets a trap for you, accuses you of a plot to murder him and —"

Tros touched his sword-hilt.

"Simon, I have two hundred and fifty fighting men. It will be a sorry pass if I can't cut my way to the beach."

"And me? What of me?"

"I will take you with me. Since you are so fearful, hide yourself to-night on my ship —"

"No," said Simon, "no! Those beach guards would arrest me!"

"Very well, then hide by the city gate. Watch the street from an upper window. Keep two or three men near you whom you can trust. Then, if you see anything of Roman soldiers entering the city after dark, you can send me warning — your messenger can pretend he brings me news about the safety of my ship. Balbus' servants may admit him, but if not, they will at least announce a messenger and I will understand. If it comes to a fight, Simon, I will pick you up by the city gate and carry you away with me. But I hold a hostage on my ship — one Gaius Suetonius. Balbus will search all Gades until he finds Conops to exchange against Gaius Suetonius."

"*O-o-o-hey!* But my household goods!" groaned Simon. "My daughters and my daughters' children!"

He put his head between his hands and leaned his elbows on the table. Tros stared at him, scratching the back of his head, wondering what argument to use next. He did not dare to leave the man in that state of panic, nor did he dare to threaten him. Fear is no antidote for fear. Somehow he must make him hope and give him courage.

"Simon," he said suddenly, "it is not too late for me to turn back. I will go to that committee of nineteen, tell them I have thought better of the risk and reclaim Conops. They will return him to me if I promise to leave Gades straight away!"

Simon sat up and for a moment stared at him with frightened eyes.

"You mean — you mean —?"

"I will sail away. I will forgive you what you owe me. I will let Gades rot in its own conspiracies."

"Tros! Tros! You can't! You promised! You can't back out of it, now you have gone this far!" Simon clutched his wrist, and Tros gave him time to feel the full force of a new emotion, staring at him coldly, looking resolute in his determination to have no more to do with Gades and its dancing-girl conspiracies. "Tros! I am an old man, you a young one! We are friends, your father was my friend. You — Tros!"

Tros shook his hand off.

"Farewell, Simon!"

"Tros! You will leave me to be crucified?"

"You have frightened me with your fears and your forebodings," Tros answered. "No man can succeed with such a lack of confidence as yours to make the skin creep up his back."

Simon staggered to his feet and, almost tottering, took hold of Tros by either arm.

"You — are you your father's son? You turn back? You?" His hoarse breath came in snores. "You leave us all at Chloe's mercy? Tros, do you know what it means to be at the mercy of a dancing girl of Gades? She knows everything. She will betray us all to save her own skin. Tros, if you leave us in the lurch now, may God —"

Tros drew Chloe's phial out of the pocket in his cloak. He offered it to Simon.

"Three drops," he remarked.

"*Stchnrarrh!* You! To that, what would your father have said? Tros, I will sooner endure the torture!"

Tros poised the phial in his hand.

"Simon, is it yes or no? Do we burn our bridge and see this matter through to a conclusion, or —"

He offered the phial again on his open palm. Simon took it, held it in his clenched fist, set his teeth —



then suddenly dashed the phial to the tiles and smashed it into fragments. A cat came and sniffed at the liquid.

"Then we are agreed? You will be brave? You will see this through?" Tros asked.

His eye was on the cat; he was beginning to feel nearly sure of Simon.

"Go!" said Simon hoarsely. "Yes. I see this through. God give you wisdom, skill, cunning, and make Balbus blind! May God protect us all."

"Amen!" said Tros.

He was watching the cat. It had lapped up nearly all the poison and seemed none the worse for it.

"Watch Chloe!" Simon urged. "She is as fickle — as fickle as quicksilver! She will betray you for the very sake of cleverness at the last second if she can see a way of doing it!"

Tros nodded. The cat had selected a sunny, warm place in a palm pot and was licking its fur contentedly.

"She will play on your emotions, she will win your confidence, she will put herself into your power, but remember, she loves nothing except slavery! Her wits are sharp. She loves to be outwitted! She is clever enough to govern Gades by whispering to Pkauchios and Balbus. And with her whole soul she craves to be governed by some one cleverer than herself! Watch her, Tros!"

Tros watched the cat, which was watching a bird, its tail twitching with the inborn instinct of a destroyer. He kicked the fragments of the phial.

"Better have those gathered, Simon! Now I go marshal my men for to-night. I have a golden bugle that the Britons gave me, and if anything goes wrong at Balbus' supper I will wind a blast on it to summon Orwic and my men. So be waiting by the city gate with your daughters and your daughters' children if you wish, in case that I have to fight my way out of Balbus' clutches."

"Have you only that Briton and those Eskualdenak?" asked Simon.

"Aye," Tros answered. "I must leave my Northmen on the ship, and to man the longboat and the barge."

"Take care! Take care!" urged Simon. "Chloe will turn that Briton and your Eskualdenak against you if she sees advantage in it!"

"She will have shot her bolt and earned her pay," Tros answered, "if she has persuaded Pkauchios that I went from his house straight to yours. I will see that the eunuch has no chance to carry tales. Those Balearic slingers on the beach shall guard him and the litter bearers until I need them again to carry me to Balbus' house. Now, swiftly, write me out an order for the manumission of a slave and leave a space blank for the slave's name and plenty of room at the bottom for Balbus' seal and signature."

## Chapter XVII

### IN BALBUS' DINING HALL

*The Jews have a proverb that says, "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish." And the Romans say, "Wine tells truth." But how often is not such truth shameful?*

*As for me, I will not perish. I can not imagine that beyond death there is less than this life. Nay, nay, death is an awakening. But to some it may resemble waking after too much wine in evil company.*

From the Log of Tros of Samothrace

In the litter belonging to Pkauchios, borne by eight slaves and preceded by a sulkily insolent eunuch, Tros presented himself at the guardhouse by the arched front gate of Balbus' palace one hour after sunset. An officer of the gate guard peered into the

litter; the eunuch sneered to him in an audible falsetto whisper about the incredible grossness of barbarians who did not give self-respecting servants time to change their uniform; the legionary clanked a shield against his breastplate as a signal to proceed and Tros was carried up a winding, broad path, in the shadow of imported Italian cypresses, into the glare of lamplight at the marble-columned porch.

There was a veritable herd of well-trained slaves in waiting. Two laid a mat for Tros to tread on as he rolled out of the litter. Two more held his cloak, lest it should inconvenience him as he moved. Two others spread a roll of carpet across the porch into the house, covering the three-headed dog done in colored mosaic and its legend, "*Cave Canem*." Two splendidly dressed slaves preceded him into the house between two lines of bowing menials and led him into a small room to the left of the hallway where no less than three slaves dusted off his sandals. A household official offered to take charge of his sword, but Tros refused, which caused some snickering among the slaves.

"Tell Balbus, your master, that to me this sword is as his toga to himself. As he receives no guest without his toga, so I enter no man's house without my symbol of independence!"

The official, shrugging his shoulders, smirking, went away to bear that message and Tros sat down on a bench to wait. The slaves seemed amused that he should give himself such airs, yet have no personal attendants of his own; they whispered jibes about him in a language they thought he did not understand; but their snickering among themselves did not prevent Tros from hearing fragments of another conversation.

Close to the bench on which he sat were curtains concealing a doorway into another small room. He heard Chloe's voice distinctly:

"Pkauchios! It is a long time since you have dared to whip me! Come to your senses! I am Chloe, not

one of the slaves who knows nothing about you!"

Pkauchios' answer was indistinct, a mere murmur of anger forced through set teeth. Then Chloe again — "Pkauchios!"

The Egyptian spoke louder with bitter emphasis:

"I have endured your impudence too long! One disobedience tonight or one mistake, and I will have all your peculium confiscated!\* I know where you put it out of my reach! I will demand it of Simon, who can't pay! Simon is one of many who will feel the weight of my hand when to-morrow's sun dawns! So remember, it is your own fault you have had no sleep. Dance and sing so well that Balbus is beside himself, or take the consequences and be whipped, reduced to beggary and sold to-morrow morning!"

The curtains parted and Pkauchios came through, frowning, stately, black-robed, with the asp of Egypt on his brow. He checked an expression of surprise at sight of Tros, but Tros managed to convince him he had heard nothing, by avoiding the obvious mistake of trying to convince him. He merely appeared glad to see him, showed him ostentatious deference for the benefit of the watchful slaves, and in a low voice spoke of the main issue:

"My men came ashore with your man, though the barge was hardly big enough to hold them. They are warned to keep silence in the quarry and to expect a midnight signal. Are your Gades rioters ready?"

Pkauchios nodded.

"They gather. Balbus' guard has been well bribed and will not interfere when a crowd surrounds the wall. When your men lead, mine will follow. Near midnight a small town twenty miles away will be set on fire and the legionaries will be summoned to keep order and to help put out the flames."

\* A slave's master had the right to do this, but the force of public opinion was against it. The usual practice was to manumit the slave in exchange for a lion's share of the money, and thus retain a valuable "client" plus more than the price of a substitute.

"In what mood is Balbus?" Tros asked him.

"He glooms. He has tortured witnesses all day and to no purpose. He even tried to read an augury in the entrails of a woman who was gored by a bull in the street as he came homeward. I have assured him you bring fortune."

"Go to him again then. Tell him I must be allowed to wear my sword and cloak."

"He will never permit it," said Pkauchios, shaking his head.

"Then I go away now!" Tros answered and began to stride toward the door.

His cloak was quite as necessary as the sword because it concealed the golden bugle.

Pkauchios detained him, clutching his arm violently; nervousness robbed him that second of all his hierophantic calm.

"I will try. But ask not too much, or you spoil all."

However, Tros knew how to deal with Romans, also with Egyptian sorcerers:

"All or nothing! Cloak and sword, or he may sup without me, and you may manage your own murders!" he added in a deep-growled undertone. Then, "Warn him he must make concessions if he hopes for help from me."

The Egyptian's face looked livid with resentment, but he vanished through the curtains and presently returned with Balbus' head steward, a freed man, ruddy from high living and exuding tact as well as dignity. He bowed, offering a wreath of bay leaves.

"Illustrious guest of my noble master," he said, "you are asked to pardon the indiscretion of the officious fool who first received you. He shall be soundly whipped. The noble Balbus naturally makes allowances for the customs of his guests and feels outraged that indignity was offered you. That handsome cloak and sword will ornament the simple style we keep, as truly as your presence will confer an honor. Pray permit me."



He adjusted the chaplet of bay leaves and, again bowing, led way across a fountained courtyard into Balbus' presence, in a room whose walls were painted with pictures of Roman legendry but done in the Egyptian style by an artist who was evidently trained in Greece. There were six other Romans in the room, two of them military tribunes in crimson tunics. All rose to their feet as Tros entered; all eyed him curiously, each in turn acknowledging his stately bow but not one of them taking the trouble to return Pkauchios' ravenly solemn greeting. Pkauchios stood back against the wall, and Balbus in a rather tired voice broke the awkward silence:

"Welcome! Be whatever gods you worship kind to us all!"

He presented Tros to all the other guests, explaining nothing, merely saying he was Tros of Samothrace whose ship lay in the harbor. They asked Tros whether he had had a pleasant voyage, and one or two of them marveled loudly at his good health.

"Most sailors come ashore so sick they can hardly walk," said a tribune, admiring Tros's bulk and stature.

"Aye," said another, "and they all get drunk in Gades, where the fever enters as the fumes of wine depart. When Balbus rebuilds the city he will have enough sailors' bones to mix all the mortar, if he pleases!"

Ushering six slaves in front of him, the steward brought in sharply flavored wine, and Tros noticed that Balbus hardly took time to spill the usual libation to the gods before he drank deep and let the slave refill his goblet. He had drunk three times and appeared to feel the effect of it, for his eye was brighter, when he gestured very condescendingly to Tros to walk beside him and led the way across the fountained court toward the dining hall.

"You shall sit at my right hand," he said, as if offering the greatest favor in his gift.

The room in which the supper had been prepared

was too large for the house, too grandiose, a foretaste, possibly, of Balbus' plans for a new city. It was overloaded with extravagant decoration. Two rows of columns divided the room into three equal sections, in the middle one of which was the supper table with the couches set, ends toward it.

At the host's end of the table was a dais hung with curtains, furnished with two gilded couches almost like long thrones. The dais was approached by three steps, and behind it were three more steps leading to a platform beneath a gallery. They had entered by a side-door, facing the kitchen and scullery; the main door of the room opened on that platform under the gallery at the rear of the dais.

Facing the dais, twenty feet beyond the table's lower end, was a wooden stage for the entertainers, with a flight of steps leading to the tiled floor of the room and smaller, narrower stages on either side for the musicians, who greeted the guests with a noisy burst of string-music — a jarring twangle of very skilfully manipulated chords.

"I dread drafts," said Balbus, explaining the crimson and blue curtains that hung from the canopy above the dais. "These stone buildings are cold when the night wind comes in from the sea. It is an ill wind, that sea wind. It moans. It makes me shudder."

He tossed off a great gobletful of red wine that the steward handed him, then reclined on the couch and signed to Tros to take the other one. The remaining guests were ushered to the places on either side of the table by obsequious attendants, and Pkauchios strode gloomily to what was evidently his usual place at the table's lower end, with his back to the stage. A procession of slaves brought jars of wine, offering each guest his choice of half-a-dozen vintages, and the guests began drinking at once, ignoring Pkauchios, pledging Balbus and one another amid jokes and laughter.

Balbus acknowledged the toast with a nod, but was silent for a long time, now and then glancing at Tros

while he toyed with the food, all sorts of food, fish, eggs, whale-meat, peacock, sow's udders, venison, birds of a dozen varieties. Tros ate sparingly and drank less, but Balbus ate hardly at all, though he drank continually. There was almost no conversation up there on the dais until entertainment commenced on the stage and most of the guests readjusted their positions so as to watch more comfortably a performer on a slack-wire, who went through diabolical contortions with a naked knife in either hand.

The contortions seemed to suggest unpleasant memories to Balbus. He drank deep and leaned toward Tros.

"Now," he said, "we can talk."

Tros glanced at the curtains behind the dais, and hinted to Balbus that he was ready to talk secrets. Balbus jerked the curtains apart, revealing the great carved cypress door at the rear of the platform behind them. The door was slightly ajar, but it was fifteen feet or more away from the dais, and there was nobody there except one of Pkauchios' slaves squatting beside a basket.

"Wait outside!" commanded Balbus, and closed the curtains on their noisy rings and rod with an impatient jerk. The wire-walker had vanished from the stage. There were nine girls dancing bawdily to dreamy music in a greenish light amid incense smoke, and the guests were giving full attention to the stage.

"I understand you wish for influence in Rome," said Balbus. "Cæsar has denounced you as a pirate. There is a way open to you to become the friend of all Cæsar's enemies."

"Are you his enemy?" Tros asked, and Balbus pouted, frowning.

"No. But the great Pompeius is my patron. A man in my position falls between two stools if he tries to serve two masters. If Cæsar should trespass into Hispania, which is Pompeius' and not Cæsar's province, he would do so at his own risk. My information is that he will be here within a few days."

Tros pretended to think awhile and to drink cup for cup with Balbus, but at the foot of his couch near the corner of the curtains there was a very large Greek vase containing flowers, into which it was not particularly difficult to empty a wine-goblet unobserved.

"If Cæsar died," Tros said at last, "Pompeius would be practically owner of the world. He would reward you."

Balbus nodded and drank deep again.

"Nothing for nothing!" Tros said abruptly. "I have brought with me the documents of which we spoke."

He drew the parchments from the pocket in his cloak.

"Presently, not now," said Balbus, showing irritation. "We will discuss those later. Watch this."

"There is nothing to discuss," Tros answered. "You have said you will sign these. Thereafter —"

But Chloe was on the stage, dancing and singing, and now Balbus had eyes and ears for nothing except her.

"Wonderful!" he muttered. "Wonderful!"

It was her wistfulness that pleased. Beneath the laughter and the daring was a hint of tragedy. She was arrayed in white, a wreath of roses in her hair — a picture of youth, innocence, mirth, modesty. But with an art beyond all fathoming she made it evident that modesty and innocence did not protect her. Not a gesture of indecency, no hint of the vulgarity the other dancers had displayed, marred rhythm, voice or harmony of sound and motion. *Saltavit placuit*.

But she pleased by being at the mercy of the men who watched, not posing as a victim that had been debauched, which is a blown rose, but as a bud just opening, aware of life, outbreathing from herself the fragrance of its essence, yet not hoping to be spared the pain of being plucked and trampled underfoot.

The words of the song she sang were Latin, but the mood was Greek, the tune a mere street melody imported by the legionaries from the wine-shops in the slums of Rome, cynically mocking its own plaintiveness.

Lover, trust the night. Day's beams shall burn again.

Dreams, trust the dawn; night's shadow shall return.

Blossom blow! Wind shall bring the warm rain.

Fruit fall! Sleep! Again a summer sun shall burn.

Vineyard they plunder sparkles in the red wine!

Wind among the sedges, ripples on the shore.

Laugh to me of glory in the passing. Oh my lover,

Is it only love whose ashes live no more?

There were tears in Balbus' eyes. He had reached an almost maudlin stage of drunkenness. When Chloe's dance was done and the noisy guests pledged her in refilled goblets of Falernian, he leaned over toward Tros again and murmured:

"I will buy that girl, though she cost me a senator's ransom! That dog of an Egyptian sorcerer shall find himself surprised for once! He may be able to read the skies, but in Gades I am Governor!"

Tros laughed, his mind on opportunity.

"For luck's sake, noble Balbus, sign these first and pledge me to your service!"

He thrust the parchments forward.

"What were they, I forget," said Balbus, passing a hand before his tired eyes. "O yes, Simon and a manumitted slave. Yes, I will presently be drunk. Yes, I will sign them."

He called for his secretary, who came with pen and ink-pot, kneeling on the dais beside Balbus' couch. The secretary read the documents.

"Are they correct?" asked Balbus.

"Simon's account is correct, and he has charged no interest, although he grants six months' time, but —"

"He may be dead in six months or an outlaw!" Balbus commented. The secretary smiled.

"— but the name of the slave to be manumitted is not written. The master's is —"

Balbus pushed him away; he nearly fell over back-



ward. Chloe was coming down the steps from the stage amid shouts of greeting from the guests. "Dance, Chloe! Dance down here among us!"

Balbus beckoned to her.

"Bring my seal!" he snapped at the secretary. "Get me this business over with!"

Chloe came up to the dais and Balbus seized her around the waist, dragging her down beside him on the couch. To Tros it seemed her wistfulness was due to weariness as much as anything, but Balbus was too far gone in drink to make discrimination of that sort.

"Chloe!" he murmured sentimentally. "Chloe! Divine Chloe! What shall I do for you? That old Egyptian holds you at a price that —"

He kissed her and she let him cling to her lips, hugging her. The secretary came and pinched her leg. She glanced at him.

"Noble Balbus," she said, "documents to sign! Oh, who would be a Governor of Gades! La-la!"

She broke away and knelt beside the secretary, exchanging one swift glance with Tros as she rubbed at her mouth with the back of her hand. Balbus had crushed her lips against her teeth.

"Swiftly now and be gone with you!" said Balbus, and the secretary put the seal on all three documents, thereafter holding them for Balbus to attach his signature. Having signed, Balbus snatched them and gave them to Tros. Chloe laughed excitedly, in a way that made Balbus stare.

"Your pen," said Tros and the secretary brought it to him.

Tros wrote the name of Chloe in the space provided and the secretary, leaning, watching him, laughed aloud, throwing up his hand in a salute to Chloe. Her eyes blazed answer, and it was that that made Balbus turn and stare at Tros.

"What is that? What have you written?" he demanded.

"I will read," Tros answered, and stood up.

There was dancing on the stage that had been set

with branches to suggest a forest, through which satyrs pursued wood nymphs; but it was dull stuff after Chloe's entertainment. All eyes turned to Tros, and the musicians dimmed the clamor of their instruments.

"An order for the manumission of a slave," Tros read, his great voice booming through the hall. "In the name of the Senate and the Roman People, I, Lucius Cornelius Balbus Minor, Governor of Gades, in conformance with the law and with the powers vested in me, hereby manumit one Chloe, formerly a slave of Pkauchios the Egyptian, and do accord to her the status of freed woman with all rights and immunities thereunto pertaining, she having paid in full her value of two hundred thousand sesterces to Pkauchios and thereto in addition, into the public treasury, the manumission tax of ten per cent."

Pkauchios sprang to his feet, indignant, staggered, his jaws working as he chewed on solid anger.

"But she hasn't paid it!" he exclaimed, his voice broken with excitement.

Tros gave a parchment to the secretary.

"Take it to him!"

The secretary, smiling with stored-up malice, descended to the floor and gave Pkauchios one of Simon's six months' bills on the treasury. He appeared to believe that Balbus had contrived the entire high-handed business, so proceeded at once to lend a hand in it.

"Noble Balbus!" he cried from the end of the table where Pkauchios stood staring at the parchment. "This order is for two hundred and twenty thousand sesterces, whereas the price was but two hundred thousand. The tax has been included in the payment made to Pkauchios."

The Egyptian lost his self-control. He shook the parchment in the faces of the grinning guests.

"This!" he exclaimed. "This is no payment! This is a mere promise —"

There was too much fume of wine in Balbus'

head for him to let that speech pass. Tros had watched him hesitating angrily between repudiation of the documents on the score of trickery and the alternative of making a hard bargain in exchange. Now he turned the full force of his insulted dignity on Pkauchios:

"You speak of my promise as — what?" he demanded, rising from the couch. His legs were steady, but Tros stepped close to him and offered his arm, which he leaned on with relief. "Do you question my signature? Do you dare to insult me in the presence of my guests?"

"But this is an unheard-of thing," Pkauchios stammered, struggling to speak calmly.

"You question my authority?" demanded Balbus.

The Egyptian regained his self-control with a prodigious effort, drawing himself to his full height, breathing deeply, then folded the parchment and stuffed it into a pocket at his breast. His mouth was bitter, his eyes malignant.

"I was taken by surprise. I regret my improper exclamation. I accept the order," he remarked and sat down, rising again promptly because Balbus was still on his feet.

Tros's lips were close to Balbus' ear.

"You will never have to pay that bill," he whispered.

"He will sell it on the market," Balbus answered irritably.

Suddenly, under the pressure of personal interest, his brain cleared.

"Yes, yes, the tax!" he said, gesturing with his left hand to the secretary. "Hold that order on the treasury until Pkauchios pays the twenty thousand sesterces in coin. Otherwise the tax farmers will accuse me of irregularities."

He remained standing until Pkauchios had returned the parchment to the secretary, then sat down and drank from the silver wine cup that Chloe held for him.

"Divine Chloe, now you are a free woman, but I

have offended Pkauchios," he said, and kissed her. "No more will he read the omens for me."

Most of the guests were growing very drunk, and the girls who had been dancing on the stage came down to sprawl on the couches beside them. One of the two military tribunes noisily demanded that Pkauchios should deliver an augury. The Egyptian glared at him with concentrated scorn, but Balbus heard the repeated demand for an augury and approved it.

"Pkauchios!" he shouted. "Prove to us you are a true seer and no caviler at fortune!"

Pkauchios rose, glaring balefully at the drunken men and nearly naked women sprawling on the couches. It was nearly a minute before his eyes sought Balbus' face.

"I see fire!" he said then in a harsh voice. "I see a whole town burning and a thousand men fighting the flames!"

"Thank the gods, not Gades!" Balbus muttered. "If it were Gades it would be twenty thousand men!"

"I will read the stars!" said Pkauchios and with a bow of angry dignity began to stride toward the dais in order to leave the room by the big door behind Balbus.

It was Chloe who intercepted him. She broke away from Balbus' arms and ran to meet him midway of the room, putting both hands on his shoulders. Pkauchios stepped back from her.

"Ingrate!" he growled between set teeth. The coiled asp on his forehead was a perfect complement to the hatred in his eyes. Chloe began whispering to him rapidly, but Pkauchios' face was like a wall against her words.

There began a noise of shouting in the court. The door behind Balbus swung open and a centurion entered breathless. Balbus jerked back the curtains.

"Well? What?" he demanded.

"Fire!" said the centurion. "A town is burning about twenty miles away. We think it is Porta Vall-  
erculæ. The tribune Publius Columella has marched all

available men to extinguish the flames. He requests you to make arrangements in behalf of those whose homes are burned."

"They shall have work in the quarries!" Balbus answered. "Bid him bring the destitute to Gades!"

The centurion saluted and withdrew. Balbus closed the curtains with a shudder at the draft, then stared at Pkauchios, who was still scowling at Chloe; but it was now Pkauchios who was whispering. His lips moved slowly, as if he were measuring threats between his teeth.

"A marvel of a man!" said Balbus. "Did you hear him just now say he could see fire? Fire and a thousand men?"

Chloe had moved so that she could catch Tros's eyes; it seemed to him that she was trying to signal to him almost imperceptibly. He touched Balbus' elbow.

"It is too early yet to read the stars. He should read them nearer midnight."

Balbus glanced at Tros impatiently.

"It was he," he said, "who prophesied your coming and Cæsar's death."

"Near midnight is the time," Tros answered. "I am a seaman. I know."

Suddenly Chloe screamed so shrilly that she startled all the amorously drunken guests and brought them sitting upright, staring at her. She clapped both hands to her eyes and ran toward the dais, stumbling up the steps and flinging herself on her knees by Tros's couch, sobbing.

"Stop him!" she whispered. "Stop him!"

Then, as if realizing she had come to the wrong couch, still sobbing with her hands before her eyes, she rose again and staggered into Balbus' arms.

"He cursed me!" she moaned. "He cursed me!"

Balbus began to try to comfort her, patting her between the shoulders, burying his own face in her hair, which gave her an opportunity to catch Tros's eye again. She made a grimace at him and jerked her head in the direction of the stage, then resumed her



sobbing. Pkauchios strode solemnly toward the door. Balbus, distracted by Chloe's grief, took no notice of him.

"Music!" Tros suggested, nudging Balbus' elbow. "Who is in charge of the entertainers? It is music that —"

Balbus laid Chloe sobbing on the couch. She was crying, "He cursed me! Oh, he cursed me!"

"Pkauchios!" he thundered and the Egyptian turned to face him. "Never was such a miserable farce in my house as this night's entertainment! Where are the singers? Why has the music ceased? You promised me such song and dancing for to-night as should —"

"You bade me read the stars," Pkauchios retorted angrily.

"No insolence!" said Balbus. "To your duty! Read me the stars at midnight."

Pkauchios turned back toward the stage and gave his orders to a wizened man with painted cheeks, who disappeared behind the stage. The orchestra began a brilliant, eccentric tune; the kitchen slaves came hurrying with a dozen dishes heaped with steaming food, and the wine-bearers went the rounds. Laughter and conversation began again as a dozen girls writhed on to the stage to perform one of the dances that had made Gades infamous. Chloe ceased her sobbing. Balbus drank deep. Chloe begged leave from him to go and wash her face before she danced again. The slaves filled up the wine cups and Balbus, refusing food, leaned over toward Tros, his drunken brain leaping from one passionate emotion to another.

"We were speaking of Cæsar. I must have no official knowledge. Do what you will suddenly, at the first chance that presents itself. Then go to Rome and I will send letters overland recommending you to the favor of Pompeius, who will be absolute master of Rome as soon as Cæsar is out of the way."

"Do you wish me to kill him in your house?" Tros asked.

"Kill him anywhere, so be you do it!"

The women on the stage danced in a delirium of orgy, parodying nature, blaspheming art, ideals, decency. Red light and incense smoke distorted the infernal scene; low drum-beats throbbed through it. One of the military tribunes stood and began singing drunkenly a song that had been outlawed by the Roman ædiles. Balbus lay chin on hands, staring at the stage. Tros felt a hand on his back, heard a whisper. Chloe had crept back between the curtains.

"Simon sends word there are soldiers coming through the city gate!"

She slipped away and knelt beside Balbus, who threw an arm around her, but went on staring at the stage. Tros did not move. He was watching Pkauchios, who was listening to the whisperings of a slave. The Egyptian's face was a picture of emotions stirring beneath a mask worn very thin.

There began to be a creeping up Tros's spine. He felt the crisis had arrived too soon. Something, he could not guess what, was happening to upset calculations. He glanced at Balbus, who was almost sleeping; Chloe with subtly caressing fingers was stroking the back of his head and temples. She smiled and nodded, her eyes shining with excitement. Plainly she knew what was happening. Tros drew out a little bag of pearls, poured them into the palm of his hand, showed them to her and put them away again. She nodded, but he knew her delight in intrigue had run away with her. She would let the pearls go for the thrill of a dramatic climax.

The girls on the stage writhed naked in infernal symbolism. The stringed instruments and muted drums tortured imagination. Pkauchios got up and left the room by a door close to the stage and Balbus, staring at the dancers, did not notice him. Tros felt for the bugle underneath his cloak, wondering whether Orwic and the Eskualdenak were ready. It was not yet nearly midnight. Possibly some spy had seen them in the quarry; perhaps the soldiers coming through the city gate were on their way to

surround them in the dark. But if so, why had nobody warned Balbus?

The suspense became intolerable. He made up his mind to wind a signal on the golden bugle. Better to summon his men and run for it than to run the risk of having them made prisoners. But as he clutched at the bugle Pkauchios returned and stood with his back to the stage, both hands raised, eyes ablaze, his body trembling with excitement.

"Balbus!" he shouted. "Cæsar is dead! The news has come from Gaul!"

Balbus sat up suddenly and stared. The music stopped. Chloe slipped away from him and stood at the edge of the dais. The dancers ceased their writhing. Pkauchios signaled to Tros with a gesture like a dagger thrust, then threw up his right hand and shouted:

"Let the trumpets peal the verdict of the sky!"

Tros clutched his sword. He thought he heard the tramp of armed men, but it was drowned by a flourish of trumpets. There was a clang of shields on armor. He leaped to his feet as the door behind the curtain opened suddenly. A hand wrenched back the curtains of the dais and revealed Julius Cæsar with an armored Roman veteran on either side of him!

Cæsar was in white, unhelmeted, a wreath of laurel on his brow, his scarlet cloak thrown back over his shoulder and his lean face smiling like a god's, inscrutable, alert, amused, as calm as marble.

The centurion at his right hand raised a richly decorated shield and shouted:

"Caius Julius Cæsar, emperor, proconsul and commander of the Roman troops in Gaul!"

## Chapter XVIII

### CÆSAR —IMPERATOR!

*Aye, measure. Milestones; beacons — distance from a headland to a headland; time; the price of onions and sailcloth; speed; angle of heel of a ship in a gale of wind. A ship is built by measure.*

*But the measure by which one man is greater than another, show it to me! I have seen a pox slay thousands. Is a pox, then, greater than the wisely gentle whom it slew with its foulness?*

*Blow ye your boasts! I have a sail and the sun and stars to steer by toward open sea.*

From the Log of Tros of Samothrace

The dancers vanished. The women sprawling on the couches fled. Balbus and his guests staggered to their feet.

“Cæsar!” said Balbus.

Cæsar smiled genially. If he had noticed Tros yet, he gave no sign of it.

“No, no, Balbus! Pray be seated. Pray don’t disturb yourself.”

His voice, a shade ironical, was reassuring. There was no hint in it of violence. But behind him were more armed men than Tros could count from where he stood. They were formed up in a solid phalanx in the hall.

“Don’t let me interrupt your gaiety,” said Cæsar. “I have already had my supper.”

“There came news of your death!” Balbus stammered.

“I overheard it. Does it seem true to you?” asked Cæsar, smiling again.

His eyes began to scrutinize the guests, who saluted as he noticed them, but he ignored Tros at the corner

of the dais. He appeared to Tros to be deliberately giving Balbus time to recover his wits. Tros, the golden bugle in his left, kept his right hand on his sword-hilt, listening, trying to discover how many armed men Cæsar had with him. None noticed Pkauchios, until suddenly Chloe screamed as the Egyptian sprang at the dais from behind Tros — mad, foaming at the mouth.

“Slay!” he screamed, striking at Tros with his left hand, trying to push him forward toward Balbus, then rushing at Cæsar.

Tros tripped him. He fell on his back on the dais, striking with a wave-edged dagger at the air.

“Dog of a Samothracian!” he yelled. Frenzied, he leaped to his feet with the energy of an old ape at bay and sprang at Tros, who knocked him down again. A legionary stepped out of the ranks at Cæsar’s back and calmly drew a sword across his throat.

“Now I am no longer a freed woman. I am free!” said Chloe. “And Balbus, you need never pay that debt!”

Cæsar looked bored by the interruption. Slaves came and dragged away Pkauchios’ body, Balbus’ steward superintending, making himself very inconspicuous. A wine-bearer poured choice Falernian over the blood on the dais carpet, and another slave mopped it up with his own long loin-cloth, running naked from the room. The steward threw salt on the carpet and covered the spot with a service napkin of blue linen.

Chloe stepped straight up to Cæsar and knelt smiling up at him with all the charm she could contrive.

“Imperator,” she said, “I am Chloe, who danced for you in Gaul — she whom Horatius Verres trusted.”

Horatius Verres stepped out from behind the ranks of legionaries and stood between Tros and Cæsar, watching with a quiet smile on his handsome face. He was dressed as a slave in a drab-colored tunic of coarse cloth.

“*Tut-tut!*” said Cæsar. “Go and clothe yourself!”



Horatius Verres made a humorous, helpless gesture. Balbus' steward touched him from behind and beckoned. He shrugged his shoulders and went with the steward to be rearrayed in borrowed finery. Tros made up his mind there were not so many men at Cæsar's back; he raised the bugle to his lips and Cæsar noticed him at last.

"Your men are here already" he said. "They are behind me!"

As if in answer to his words there began a roar of fighting. A centurion barked an order. About half of Cæsar's own men faced about and vanished toward the front of the house, but Cæsar took no notice whatever of the disturbance.

"Balbus," he said, "a noble enemy is preferable to any faithless friend. The story goes you sent men into Gaul to murder me."

Chloe was still kneeling. She caught her breath and glanced sharply at Balbus' face. Balbus, deathly white, threw up his right hand.

"Cæsar, by the immortal gods I swear —"

Something choked Balbus. He coughed. He had become aware that Tros was staring at him. He drew breaths before he found his voice again:

"— that sorcerer, now dead, that Egyptian Pkauchios — and —"

He turned and looked straight at Tros, began to raise his arm to point at him. Tros drew his sword.

"Balbus," said Cæsar, "you have been well served! Well for you that Tros of Samothrace put into Gades!"

Balbus gasped. Tros stood with drawn sword watching Cæsar's face. A centurion came pushing past the legionaries and whispered to Cæsar from behind him. Horatius Verres reëntered the room, handsome, smiling, splendid in a Roman tunic with a broad blue border, and stood close to Tros again, glancing at the drawn sword with a humorous expression.

Balbus' brain was wavering between surrender to the fumes of wine and a sort of half hysterical recovery. Tros's mind was on Orwic and his men, but

he could not fight his way past Cæsar's legionaries. Cæsar fascinated him. The man's cool self-command, his manners, daring and superb contempt for any genius less comprehensive than his own stirred grudging admiration.

Chloe broke the silence —

"Imperator —"

But Cæsar checked her with a gesture of his left hand. He was listening. Tros, too, caught the sound of footsteps surging over the porch into the house.

"Orwic!" he shouted.

There came an answering yell, and half the legionaries behind Cæsar faced about.

"Orwic, hold your men!" Tros roared in Gaulish. Then, watching Cæsar's face, "Let none escape! Let a hundred of your men surround the house and guard all exits!"

He laughed. He heard Orwic's boyish voice repeating the order to the Eskualdenak.

"Cæsar," he said, "I have more than five men to your one! The camp is empty, the Roman legion went to a burning village —"

"Yes," said Cæsar, "but that was not your doing, Tros, so you must not boast of it."

"Cæsar!" said Balbus suddenly, recovering his wits, "this is not your province!"

He glanced at Tros, a fever of excitement in his eyes. The legionaries behind Cæsar moved alertly to protect him.

"The illustrious Tros and I are enemies," said Cæsar, "whose activities are not confined to provinces or marred by malice. We use common sense. I have not interfered with your government, Balbus. You must pardon me if I have interrupted even your —" he glanced at the stage — "amusement."

Tros's brain was speculating furiously. There were only two things Cæsar could be doing. Either he had surprises up his sleeve and was talking to gain time, or else he was deliberately trying to bring Balbus to his senses with a view of getting his gratitude and making

use of him. In either event, time was all-important.

"Cæsar," he said, "why did you come to Gades? What do you want?"

"Yes, Cæsar, what do you want?" demanded Balbus.

Cæsar smiled.

"For one thing, courtesy!" he answered. "Balbus, I consider you a churlish host! You offer me no seat, no welcome. You oppose me guiltily, as if I caught you in the act of treachery. Whereas I came for your sake."

But Balbus was too drunk to take a hint.

"You came uninvited!" he said, sneering.

Cæsar smiled again and glanced at Tros.

"I think we both did! Tros, for what reason did you come to Gades?"

"To prevent you from invading Britain, Cæsar!"

"Imperator, that is the truth!" said Chloe, and she would have said more, but Cæsar silenced her with a frown.

"Are you a slave?" he asked.

"No, Cæsar, I am free!"

"Then go to Horatius Verres and keep still."

Chloe sprang gaily to Verres' side and threw her arms around him, kissed him, or else whispered in his ear. Tros suspected the latter. Orwic was having trouble with the Eskualdenak, who were anxious to begin looting Balbus' treasures. In the outer hall his voice kept rising sharply. There were hot answers in almost incomprehensible Gaulish, and every once in a while a Roman centurion added his staccato warning to the noise. Horatius Verres spoke at last.

"Imperator," he said quietly, "I had the honor to report to you that Tros refused to murder Balbus, and you saw that when Pkauchios rushed at you, it was Tros who prevented. Now Chloe tells me that while Tros and Balbus supped together they discussed —"

"Silence!" snapped Balbus angrily. "Cæsar, will you take the word of a dancing girl against me?"

Cæsar eyed him with amused contempt.

"If she should testify for you, should I accept her evidence then?" he asked. Then after a pause, "Let Horatius Verres speak."

"Tros even left a pledge with the committee of nineteen to guarantee that he would not kill Balbus."

Balbus snorted.

"A committee of nineteen? I never heard of them!"

"You shall know them well," said Cæsar. "Continue, Verres."

"And while Tros and Balbus supped together they discussed —"

"Stop!" commanded Balbus, almost choking. "Cæsar, this is not your province! You have no authority to —"

Cæsar raised his right hand with a gesture so magnificent that Balbus checked a word midway and stared at him open-mouthed. Chloe was whispering again in Verres' ear. Cæsar nodded to Verres.

"They discussed what Tros had previously said to me before the committee of nineteen — how that his father, dying, prophesied he should eventually render Cæsar a great service."

Balbus breathed heavily and felt for something to lean against. His steward stepped up to the dais and, lifting his arm, placed it on his own shoulder.

"My noble master has so burdened himself with public duties that he faints," he said, beckoning to a slave to bring wine.

"I suggest he has had wine enough," said Cæsar. "You may continue, Verres."

Chloe was watching Tros out of the corner of her eye. Her breast fluttered with excitement. Verres spoke:

"While Balbus and Tros supped together, they discussed whether it were true that you invaded Britain for the sake of pearls."

"I invaded Britain," said Cæsar, smiling slightly with the corners of his eyes as he saw Tros glare at Chloe, "because the Britons intrigued with the Gauls

against me, despite all warnings. But I confess the thought of pearls did interest me. I have in mind to make a breastplate of them for the statue of the Venus Genetrix in Rome, from whose immortal womb I trace descent," he added pompously. It was his first hint of vulgarity, his first betrayal of a streak of weakness. "What else, Horatius Verres?"

"Tros, who promised thirty pearls to Chloe to procure for him the interview with Balbus, discussed with Balbus at the supper table how he might offer three hundred pearls to yourself, Imperator, as an inducement to you to bury enmity!"

The lie slid off his handsome lips as smoothly as the passing moment. Balbus, his steward urging with a whisper, leaped at opportunity at last.

"I told him he should offer at least a thousand pearls," he blustered, avoiding Tros's eyes. "Cæsar, the words had hardly left my lips when you burst in on us!"

Horatius Verres, hand to his mouth, stepped back a pace.

"I told you I serve Cæsar!" he whispered to Tros.

"Have you the pearls?" asked Cæsar, and Tros saw light at last, knew he must make a sacrifice, but saw he held the situation in the hollow of his hand.

"I have them on my ship," he answered, standing forth and facing Cæsar.

But his eyes were busily numbering the men at Cæsar's back. Beyond the legionaries, in the gloom of the fountained courtyard, he could dimly make out Orwic and the Eskualdenak crowding the Romans.

"I have here five men to your one, Cæsar, and I care nothing for your friendship."

"Have I offered it?" asked Cæsar, adjusting his wreath with one fore-finger. "Let us have no brawling, Tros. The place smells like a tavern" — he sniffed disgustedly — "but" — he bowed with mock politeness — "perhaps our host Balbus will excuse us if we act like sober men!"

"Cæsar, I could have slain you when you entered. I



could slay you now," Tros answered. "I would hold my own life cheap at the price of saving Gaul and Hispania, but the gods have laid no such task on me. Ten tyrants might replace you if I slew the one. I came here for my own sake. I will pay three hundred pearls for what I want. Agree with me or —"

He raised the golden bugle to his lips. Orwic began shouting to him:

"Tros! Tros! What is happening?"

"Await my bugle blast," Tros answered. "Cæsar, is it yes or no?"

The legionaries raised their shields an inch or two, but Cæsar spread both arms out to restrain them.

"Better to die a thousand times than to live in fear of death," he said, "but I see, Tros, that you know that. Since neither you nor I fear death, we may stand on common ground. What is it you require of me?"

"You named me pirate," Tros growled at him.

"I withdraw that gladly, though you sunk my ships. You have served Rome by saving Gades from the mob. I will write it," said Cæsar.

"You owe my friend Simon of Gades three million sesterces," said Tros.

"If that were only all!" said Cæsar, smiling with an air of mock humility. "Debts, Tros, seem as necessary to a statesman as is the appetite that makes us eat. Your friend Simon shall be paid."

"How? When?" Tros asked him.

A flash of humor blazed in Cæsar's eyes. He looked at Balbus long and keenly.

"Balbus — how? When?" he asked calmly.

Balbus bit his lip.

"Come now, Balbus. Tros saved your life, and it is easier for me to act against you than to threaten you. How shall Simon be paid? That legion that went to Porta Valleculæ is on its way back, Balbus, shouting, 'Cæsar is imperator!' — No, no, Tros, there is a truce between us. Stay! I merely wish that Balbus should choose his allegiance — of your free will, Balbus —

of your free will! You are under no restraint. As you wisely remarked, I have no authority in Gades, even though the committee of nineteen has begged me, on my way between the harbor and your house, to add Hispania to my province and appoint my own officials. They amused me, but it might amuse me more to —”

“Cæsar, I beg you to permit me to assume the debt!” said Balbus.

“I am afraid it will keep you poor and out of mischief for a long time,” Cæsar remarked. “If I consent to allow to escape my mind irregularities that I have heard of, would it be agreeable to you to confer in future with that committee of nineteen with respect to all local issues?”

Balbus nodded sulkily.

“And to remember, Balbus, that they have my individual protection? If the world were my province — then would you wish to rebuild Gades?”

“Cæsar, I yield,” said Balbus. “When the day comes that you strike at Pompey, I am with you.”

“*Tut-tut!*” remarked Cæsar. “Who spoke of striking at Pompey? But I see Tros grows impatient. He is thinking of that legion on its way back from Porta Valleculæ. Tros, you are a greater man than I believed you. A mere pirate would have plundered Gades with the opportunity you have had. Had you been a rash fool, you would have tried to kill me. You might even have succeeded and the world would have been the worse for it. So the world owes you a reward, Tros.”

“Reward my men!” Tros answered. The Eskualdenak were growing noisier every minute and Orwic’s voice was hoarse from trying to restrain them.

“Balbus shall pay them handsomely,” said Cæsar. “They have saved his life. The world is richer for our noble Balbus, although he personally will be poorer for a long time! Yes, Tros, I will accept your gift of pearls for the breastplate of the Venus Genetrix,

be it understood — a very amiable goddess, my immortal ancestress.”

He strode forward to a couch and sat with grace and dignity, letting the scarlet cloak fall carefully to hide his knees.

“You are in haste, I don’t doubt. Yes, of course, that legion is returning. Yes, yes. Balbus, may your secretary bring me ink and parchment? I carry my own pen. Tros, I believe you have my seal. Will you return it to me? Balbus, will you kindly see that Tros’s men are handsomely paid? They were my men until Tros ran off with them, hah-hah! Very clever of you, Tros, but beware next time we meet! There was three months’ pay at that time owing to each man. So I suggest it would be very handsome of you, Balbus, to give each man three months’ full pay of a Roman soldier. It might encourage them not to loot the house! Then, will some one go for Simon and for the committee of nineteen? Balbus, I would like to introduce them to you and to recommend them personally to your generous consideration. By the way, Tros, where are those pearls?”

“On the ship,” Tros answered.

Chloe came and stood in front of him and smiled. She held her hand out. Tros counted thirty pearls into her palm, holding his sword under his armpit.

“Cæsar!” she said excitedly. “Imperator! Grant me permission to wear pearls!”

Glancing up from the parchment he was writing, Cæsar frowned. Horatius Verres put a word in:

“Imperator, no permission will be needed. She will be a Roman’s wife!”

“Very well. Why interrupt?” said Cæsar, and went on writing. “Balbus,” he jerked over his shoulder, “are Tros’s men being paid?”

“My treasurer is paying them.”

“Has Simon been sent for? Very well. Be good enough to sign this undertaking to pay to Simon three million sesterces in equal payments of three hundred thousand sesterces every three months.

You understand, of course, this payment is not taxable. He must receive the whole of it. Tros —”

He stood up, holding out a parchment.

“This confers on you authority to go anywhere you please, including Ostia and Rome. It specifically withdraws the charge of piracy against you and names you the friend of the Roman People. You will find the committee of nineteen on the porch. They will return your one-eyed hostage to you. If you should remove his other eye, he might see his way into trouble less easily.

“However, that is for you to decide. You will meet your friend Simon on your way toward the city gate. Be good enough to take him with you to your ship and to give him this liquidation of his debt in exchange for them. I understand you have a hostage on your ship, one Gaius Suetonius. Release him, please. Not that he has any virtue, but for the sake of his beautiful armor. Have you any other prisoners?”

“Herod, the Jew,” Tros answered.

“That scoundrel?” Cæsar nodded. “Send him to me in charge of Gaius Suetonius! Be good enough to avoid collision with the little ship on which I came. It is anchored rather close to yours. You will go to Rome now?”

“Aye!” Tros answered, accepting the parchment.

“Hah! You will try to prevent me from invading Britain! You will find the Romans less reasonable than myself. When you have failed, come and make your peace with me. I will receive you! Thanks for the pearls for the —”

“For the wives of the Roman senators!” said Tros and, bowing, first to Cæsar, then to Balbus, marched out straight through the ranks of Cæsar’s bodyguard. He was greeted by a roar from the Eskualdenak:

“Wine! Women! Wine!”

His answering roar, bull-bellowed, cowed them into silence.

“To the ship! Behind me, march! Or I will give the

lot of you to Cæsar! Ho there, Conops! Run ahead of me and keep a bright lookout for Simon."

Then he strode under the gloomy cypresses to Balbus' front gate and Orwic fell in step beside him full of eagerness to know exactly what had happened.

"Happened?" he said. "I have promised 'druids' pearls to Cæsar's light o' loves, and I have served Cæsar, though I had the best of him. Rot me all death-bed prophecies. They dull men's wits!"

"What next?" asked Orwic.

"Oar and sail for Ostia, before Cæsar has time to set a trap for us in Rome!"

## Chapter XIX

ROME: 54 B.C.

*I have failed often at what I attempted, and at the time I have learned from failure nothing except not to flatter it by calling it the end. At its worst it is but a beginning of some new phase of destiny. But looking backward, as when remembering night at day-break, I have learned what gives me courage to look forward. I perceive that failure more often than not is the fruit of a man's forgetfulness of his own importance in the Eternal Plan.*

From the Log of Tros of Samothrace

Summer twilight deepened and the bats began to flit among the tombs and trees that lined the Via Appia. Dim distant lights irregularly spaced, suggested villas, standing well back from the road amid orchards and shade-trees, but the stench of trash-heaps and decaying ordure overwhelmed the scent of flowers, and there was a dirge of stinging insects irritating to seafaring men. The slaves who bore Tros's litter flapped themselves with olive twigs, muttering and grunting as they bent under their burden.



Beside the litter, cursing unaccustomed sandals that chafed his swollen feet, limped Conops, with the tassel of his knitted seaman's cap dangling over the empty socket of his right eye. With his left hand he held the litter, and with the stick in his right hand he kept prodding the wretched contractor's slave in front of him, throwing him out of step and then abusing him in half the languages of Asia Minor.

On a horse behind the litter, looking like a centaur — for he rode magnificently — Orwic led twelve Britons, who marched leg-wearily with short spears over their shoulders; they wore a rather frightened look and crowded closely in the ranks. Behind them came a two-wheeled cart piled high with luggage held down by a net. Two Northmen were perched on top of the pile, and behind the cart trudged four-and-twenty other Northmen, battle-axes over shoulder, targets slung behind them. They swung from the loins like men well used to it, although there was a hint of a deep-sea roll, and more than a suggestion in the northern song they hummed of wind, waves and battle on a surf-enthundered beach.

A beacon many miles away behind — where one stage-contractor was giving warning to the next one beyond the skyline, that a personage was coming southward and would need relays of horses — gleamed on the narrow road and made imagination leap the shadows in between; the Via Appia ran as straight as an arrow and twenty weary miles resembled one.

In front, the lights of Rome blinked sparsely. There was a house on fire that threw a red glare on the belly of a cloud and showed in silhouette the roofs of temples and the outlines of two hills edged with buildings, like the teeth of a broken saw. There were temple lights, and over one or two streets where the night life swarmed there lay a stream of hazy yellow. Here and there a light showed through an upper window, and there was a suggestion rather than

the sound of babbling tongues; Rome looked, in the near distance, like a crouching monster, and the ear deceived itself with what the eye conveyed.

In the shadows of the tombs and cypresses that lined the road lurked men — and occasionally women — who peered at the litter and vanished at the sight of so many armed men. Runaway slaves, almost numberless, lived in the shadow of terror cast by stenching gibbets, on which scourged human bodies writhed or rotted near every cross-road; there had been a recent and, as usual, sporadic outburst of official morals, so the runaways were rather less bold and more hungry, lurking in the neighborhood of villas and the north- and south-bound traffic, but afraid to try conclusions with the passer-by.

“Master,” said Conops at last, thrusting his ugly head in through the litter curtains, “take advice from me for once and let us find an inn. There are enough of us to throw out all the thieves who occupy the place —”

“Aye, and to make a meal for nearly half the bed-bugs!” Tros interrupted. “No more inns, little man! Rot me such dung-heaps! Am I a Carthaginian ambassador\* that Rome should not provide me with a decent place to sleep? I tell you, Conops, here, unless a man considers his own dignity, none thinks he has any.”

“Would we were safely at sea again!” Conops grumbled, leaning his weight on the litter and kicking at one of the bearer-slaves, whose slouching irritated him.

“We are near Zeuxis’ house. I see it yonder,” Tros said, leaning through the curtains. “Bid the bearers turn where that tree, like a broken ship’s mast, stands against the sky.”

“Zeuxis sounds like a Greek in foreign parts,” said

\* One of the contributing causes of the Second Punic War was the indignation of the Carthaginian ambassadors at being obliged to stay at an inn outside Rome.

Conops gloomily. "Commend me rather to a crocodile! Not for nothing, master, was I born in Hellas. Keepers of Roman inns are like their bedbugs — one can crack them between thumb and finger. But a Greek — has this Zeuxis a master?"

"He is a distinguished Roman citizen," Tros answered. "Furthermore, I have a hold on him."

"Poseidon pity us! A Greek turned Roman is a wolf with a woman's wits! Better give me the pearls to keep!"

"Keep your insolence in bounds, you ignorant salt-water fish! Go forward — lead the way up the path beyond that broken tree; try not to behave as if you were selling crabs out of a basket! Spruce yourself! Erect yourself! Up chin, you dismal looking dog! Put your knife out of sight! Shall Zeuxis' servants think we are Cilician pirates? Swagger forward now, and ruffle on the manners of a nobleman's retainer!"

Conops did his best, shaking the dust from his kilted skirt and straightening his cap, but he limped painfully. Orwic, recognizing climax, ordered out a great ship's lantern from the cart and sent one of the Britons running forward with it; he thrust the lantern into Conops' hand and ran back to his place in the ranks as if ghosts were after him, whereat Orwic laughed.

The lane by the broken tree was unpaved and dusty but there was a row of recently set cypresses on either hand; their height, a grown man's, intimated that the owner of the villa at the lane's end had not occupied it long, but he was advanced in his notions of living. There was gravel in the ruts, and there were no pigs sleeping in the shadows. The lowing of cows in the distance suggested affluence, and as the lane lengthened there began to be neat walls on either hand, built of the broken rubble of older walls well laid in *pòzzolana*.\*

\* *Pulvis putteolanis* — the material which the Romans mixed with lime to make their famous concrete.

The lane ended at a high gate swung on masonry posts surmounted by marble statuary, whose outline merged itself into the gloom of overhanging trees. A grille in the wooden gate was opened in answer to Conops' demand to know what the owner of the house would say to keeping the most noble and famous Tros of Samothrace waiting in the dark. The slave behind the grille remarked that he would go and see. During the short pause, all of them, including Orwic's horse, flapped savagely at swarms of gnats.

Then the great gate swinging wide, revealed the porch of a Greco-Roman villa, newly built, its steps about two hundred paces from the garden entrance. Parchment-shaded lanterns cast a glow over the columned front, making the stucco look like weathered marble. There was a burst of music and an almost overwhelming scent of garden-flowers, as if the gate had dammed it and now let it pour into the lane. A dozen slaves came running, six on each side of the path, and behind them Zeuxis strode, combining haste with dignity, extending his arms in welcome as Tros rolled out of the litter and stood blinking at the lamplight.

"Tros of Samothrace — as welcome as Ortygian Artemis!" he cried in Greek, gesturing dramatically at the full moon rising like a mystery between the treetops.

"May the goddess bless your house, and you!" Tros answered. "Greeting, Zeuxis!"

They embraced and Tros presented Orwic, who rather embarrassed the Greek by leaping from his horse and also embracing him in the British fashion.

"All Rome would fight to kiss him if they knew how he can drive a chariot!" Tros said, half apologetically. "He is a barbarian prince."

"A prince among your followers — prosperity! The more the merrier, friend Tros, and the surprise adds zest. My house is yours; enter with your friend and take possession."

He led Tros by the arm, but paused to study him

keenly in the lamplight on the porch, where slaves fawned and a steward prodded them to make them more obsequious.

"You have aged ten years in two," he remarked, "and yet — I will wager you bring good news."

Tros only grunted. Zeuxis led the way into a hall, of which he was comically ashamed. The walls were painted with scenes from the Iliad, done recently and too spectacularly. There the steward took charge of Tros and Orwic, leading them away to a bathroom, where slaves sluiced and kneaded them for half-an-hour and other slaves brought blue-bordered Roman clothing in place of their travel-stained Gaulish costumes. The luxury made Orwic talkative and it was an hour before they rejoined Zeuxis, in an anteroom beside the dining-room that faced on a tiled courtyard in which a fountain played amid flowers and young girls moved with calculated grace. There was music somewhere, not quite loud enough to make the fountain-splash inaudible.

"You must excuse my house," said Zeuxis. "I have baited it to catch some Roman buyer who has made a fortune selling war material. I am afraid the penalty you pay for coming unannounced is to wait for dinner, while the cook makes miracles. Why didn't you send word, you spirit of unexpectedness?"

Tros signified with a frown that he would prefer to keep silence until the slaves had left the room but Zeuxis laughed.

"My slaves will have your story from your followers. You may as well talk at your ease!" he assured him.

"I have only one man who can speak any language your servants know," Tros answered. "If your craftiest man — or woman — can get one word out of Conops, Rome is welcome to it. I sent no word because I trusted none to carry it."

The Greek leaned back in a gilded chair, looked humorously into Tros's eyes, took a goblet from a slave and held it while another poured the wine. Then



he rose and, spilling a libation to the gods, smiled at Tros over the brim of the goblet.

"I see you understand the Romans," he remarked, and, having sipped, sat down again.

He was a handsome Greek with quantities of brownish hair curled artificially, his age perhaps not over forty, but not less than that. The care with which the wrinkles had been smoothed out from his face, and the deliberately studied youthfulness of gesture rather hinted that he might be older than he cared to seem. He had an air of artificial daintiness; there was a sapphire on the middle finger of his left hand that sparkled wickedly, calling attention to the delicacy of his fingers, which looked more capable of handling drawing instruments than weapons.

The contrast between him and Tros was as great as could be imagined between two men of the same race. Zeuxis' smile suggested cynicism and ability to reach a given goal by going around obstacles, which Tros would simply smash.

There was a desultory conversation for a while, because the slaves were Greek. Orwic, knowing neither Greek nor Latin, watched the scantily clad girls and after a while confined his interest to one, whose movements were deliberately calculated to enchant him. When the steward announced that the meal was served he followed Zeuxis with such manifest reluctance that the Greek laughed.

"Tell your barbarian friend not to leave his heart here. She shall wait on him at dinner."

The dining-room was classically elegant, its walls adorned with paintings of the Muses and divided into panels by Corinthian half-columns of white marble. The furniture was Alexandrian. The food, cooked by a slave from Syria, was carried in by Greek girls.

There was no sign of Zeuxis' wife; Tros guardedly remarked on it.

"She is at my country place in the Aventines," said Zeuxis. "Like many another foolish fellow I married youth and beauty instead of experience and domestic

virtue. Beauty, in Rome, arouses greed; if possible one steals it; failing that one buys. If neither, then one gets the lawful owner into difficulties and converts him to a Roman point of view — which means, to look the other way. So I have sent my wife to the Aventines in charge of a virago who, current rumor has it, is a midwife; you will have noticed, however, that rumor frequently exaggerates. Meanwhile, my difficulties disappear and trade is excellent.”

Lolling gracefully on his couch at the head of the table, with Tros on his right hand, Orwic on his left, toying with the food rather than enjoying it, he kept up a running comment for the steward's benefit, not often praising the skill with which the viands were made to resemble something they were not, more often explaining how they might be better.

“My Syrian cook is an artist,” he complained to Tros. “In Alexandria they might appreciate him. Here in Rome you must be vulgar if you wish for popularity. Food must be solid, in gross quantities and decorated like the Forum with every imaginable kind of ornament, the more crowded and inappropriate the better. Rome proposes to debauch herself with culture; so I have to crucify a good cook's soul and train girls how to misbehave. I was cursed with vision when I came into the world; I foresee the trend of events, and I know I must swim with the stream or go under, so I try to guide the Romans decorously along the line of least resistance. They began by being wolves and they will end by being pigs, but that is for the gods to worry over, not me. I am a contractor. I arrange banquets. I decorate interiors for *equites* who grew rich lending money. You know the system, of course? The tax-farmers drain the treasury of conquered provinces, compelling them then to borrow at twenty-four per cent. compound interest; when accumulated interest amounts to half-a-dozen times the principal, the inhabitants are all sold into slavery. Most of my girls were obtained in that way. Damnable? Undoubtedly. But I might be a slave my-

self if I had stayed in Greece instead of coming here and flattering that rich rogue Crassus. He had me made a Roman citizen, although I might have had the same favor from Pompeius Magnus. Do you know how Crassus made his money? With a fire-brigade. There are some who say he also kept incendiaries. His men monopolized the putting out of fires by always arriving first on the scene in great numbers and fighting for the privilege. Soon nobody else dared to put a fire out. Crassus' men would simply stand by and let the place burn until the owner was willing to sell it to Crassus for a song. Then out would go the fire, Crassus would restore the place and let it out at rack-rents. He has the trick of money-making.

“But he is mad; he covets military honors. He has gone to fight the Parthians. He is envious of Cæsar's fame. Caius Julius Cæsar, if he lives, will ruin both him and Pompey, but they say Cæsar has the falling sickness. I have also heard said that his sickness is the result of slow poison secretly administered by one of his lieutenants in the pay of some patrician. Cæsar is a patrician; but he has made all the other patricians loathe him by his systematic pandering to the plebes. He sends gladiators for the games and corn-doles — that might not matter so much; they all do it. His worst offense is the money he sends from Gaul to buy the election of candidates who keep Rome in political torment. He also sends presents to senators' wives, and keeps a swarm of paid propagandists, who sing his praises to the crowd at every opportunity. Cæsar has brains. One of the brightest things he ever did was to marry his daughter to Pompey. She is a charming woman. Consequently, Pompey has to pose as Cæsar's friend, whatever his feelings may be — not that they are particularly secret — he says little, but every one knows he thinks Cæsar a dangerous demagogue.”

Zeuxis gossiped gaily through the meal, doing his best to loosen Tros's tongue and reversing usual procedure, ordering the finer qualities of wine brought

as the meal progressed. Orwic, unaccustomed to such subtle vintages, drank copiously and before the meal was over fell asleep. Tros's taciturnity only increased as he listened to Zeuxis' chatter. He had almost nothing to say until the meal was finished and Zeuxis wanted to leave Orwic in the woman's care.

"Zeus!" he exploded then. "Sober, a man needs help to save him from the women. Drunk, not all the gods together could protect him! And besides," he added, looking straight in Zeuxis' eyes, "I myself will tell you all you need to know. If you have a slave-woman who knows Gaulish, keep her for some necessary business."

Four slaves carried Orwic to a bedroom and Tros sent for Conops to sleep on a mat at the foot of the bed.

"Not that I doubt your honor, Zeuxis, I am thoughtful of it. This handsome cockerel recovers like a Phoenix from the ashes of a feast. Not remembering where he is, he might remember, nevertheless, that he is a king's nephew — which means a king's son, less the need of self-restraint. Conops knows how to manage him."

Conops' one eye glinted meaningly as he met Tros's glance and nodded. Hideous though he was, it took no augury to guess that Zeuxis' women had been making love to him for information; he made a gesture with a clenched fist that meant, and was interpreted to mean, "they have learned nothing from me!"

Zeuxis led into a room where gilded couches with a low wine-table set between them gave a view through an open window into the lamp-lighted courtyard, where a dozen girls were posing near a fountain.

"Shall they dance?" he asked.

"Aye — into the River Lethe! Let a slave set wine in here and leave us," Tros suggested.

Zeuxis laughed, dismissing the girls with a wave of his hand. The slaves retired. Tros strode to the curtain drawn on rings across the doorway and jerked it

back to make sure none was listening. Then he glanced into the courtyard and at last sat down on the window-ledge, whence he could talk while watching both the courtyard and the corridor beyond the now uncurtained door.

"I am honored!" said Zeuxis, bantering him. "These must be deadly secrets you intend to pour forth. Come and drink; this wine of Chios was reserved for Ptolemy the Piper. I was able to acquire it because Ptolemy came to Rome to borrow money when the Alexandrians drove him off the throne. He gave a feast to a number of Roman senators, for which I was the contractor and, though they lent him money, he has never paid my bill. I shall have to repay myself by roundabout means. The senate is forever obedient to the money-lenders. Mark my words — they will send Cæsar or Marcus Antonius one of these days to collect. Drink! Ptolemy the Piper knows good wine, if nothing else. The old fool gave his note to Cæsar for seventeen and a half million sesterces to persuade him not to veto sending Gabinius and Rabirius to Egypt."

Tros reached under his tunic and produced a little bag tied tightly with a leather thong. He bit the thong loose, glanced into the bag, tied it again and tossed it into Zeuxis' lap. The Greek weighed it, eyed it curiously, opened it at last and poured nine pearls into his hand. His eyes blazed.

"Plunder?" he asked.

"My gift," said Tros.

"By Aphrodite's eyes! By all the jewelers of Ephesus — these are better than the pearls that Pompey took from Mithridates. There are no such pearls in Rome," said Zeuxis, rolling all nine on the palm of his hand and stirring them with a sensitive forefinger. "They are matched! Tros, they are priceless! Whom do you wish to have murdered?"

"Are you a contractor in that trade, too?" Tros asked him sourly.

"No, but since Sulla's time one can always hire



that sort of tradesman. Nobody is safe in Rome without an armed band at his back. Do you wish me to introduce you to a Roman who will work himself, for a consideration, into the necessary righteous frenzy? And who is the victim to be? Some one important, or my wits deceive me as to the value of this present."

"When I must kill, then it is I who kill," Tros answered. "I could buy nine senators with those nine pearls."

"You force me to admire myself!" said Zeuxis. "Have you any more of these?"

"Nine more for you, of nearly the same weight if — when my venture is successful."

"Tros, you deal a dreadful blow against the inborn honesty of Hellas!\* Whom do you wish me to betray to you, and why?"

"Yourself!" Tros answered. "One who did not know me might propose to play me false. But you will not commit that indiscretion. I have chosen you to assist me in a certain matter."

"You oblige me to pity myself!" remarked Zeuxis. "A king's nephew and a king's pearls? Rome is no playground for kings; they come here begging, or to walk in triumphs and be strangled afterward. Whoever befriends kings in Rome — and yet — friend Tros, these pearls are irresistible! Have you come like a messenger from Pluto to arrange my obsequies?"

"I come from Britain."

"Britain? The end-of-the-world-in-a-mist, where Cæsar landed with the famous Tenth and ran away again by night? Hah! How the patricians gloated over that defeat! I was decorating Cicero's new villa at Pompeii and I overheard him telling what the senate thought of it; they were overjoyed to learn that Cæsar is not invincible."

"But he is," said Tros. "He is invincible unless we can — Those pearls are in your hand because he *shall not be* invincible!"

\* Greece.

## Chapter XX

### POLITICS

*A man forgets his own importance, but he magnifies want and the mystery of the many moods of want, his own included. He forgets that his wants and his fears and his perplexity are unimportant, but his own importance is eternal and changeless, whereas wants continually change, and fear is the illusion of which wants are brewed like foul stink from a wizard's kettle. If a man can remember his own importance he is saved from many unimportant but bemeaning deeds. His dignity, should he remember his importance and the unimportance of his fears and wants, directs him to a right course, though it may seem at the moment lacking in profundity of rightness.*

From the Log of Tros of Samothrace

Zeuxis stared, his shrewd imaginative eyes growing narrower under slightly lowered lids. He was not one who attempted to conceal emotions; he preferred exaggeration as a safer mask. But Tros's face, as he sat still on the window-ledge, was a picture of iron resolution, unafraid although aware of danger. Zeuxis was aware of an excitement he could not resist.

"I have a friend who is a king in Britain," Tros began, but Zeuxis interrupted —

"Kings are no man's friends."

"I helped him against Cæsar. He helped me to build my ship. Caswallon is his name."

"Did he give you these pearls? Beware! King's gifts are expensive."

"I had those from the druids."

"Ah! You interest me. I have talked with druids.

Cæsar sent a dozen of them in a draft of prisoners from Gaul. One had a beard that nearly reached his knees. He was so old he had no teeth. It was hard to understand him, but he knew Greek and could write it. I befriended him. The others were sold as secretaries, but since that old one was a hierarch they were to keep him to walk in Cæsar's triumph; the weight of the fetters killed him before long — that and the stink of the dungeon; he was used to open air. There was a new ædile making a great bid for popularity. I was one of three contractors who had charge of the games he squandered stolen money on, so I had plenty of opportunity to talk with that old druid. I used to go down to the dungeons whenever I had time, pretending to look for some one who might make a showing against an enormous bear they had sent from Ephesus — bears usually kill a man with one blow, whereas what the spectators want is to see a fight. It was thought, if a man with a knife would defend himself against the bear for a few minutes that ædile might be very popular.

"I didn't find a man to fight the bear. I did not want to; I was interested in the druid, he talked such charming nonsense with such an air of authority. He told me, among other things, that Cæsar is an agent of dark forces that will blot out what remains of the ancient Mysteries and make Rome all-powerful for a while. He said if Cæsar dies too soon those forces will find some one else, because their cycle has come, whatever that means, but meanwhile Cæsar is in the ascendant because he typifies the spirit that asserts itself in Rome. So if you think as much of the druids as I do, Tros, you will think twice before you oppose Cæsar."

"I have thought twice, and the second thought was like the first," Tros answered.

"Think a third time. Rome is violent, strong, cruel, split up into factions, yet united by its greed. They have had to postpone the elections. Pompey does

nothing — I tell you, Cæsar is inevitable! Let us flatter Cæsar and grow rich when he has made himself master of the world!”

“Those pearls are worth a fortune,” Tros reminded him.

“There is no such thing as enough,” said Zeuxis. “There is too much and too little, but enough — who ever saw that? You have given me nine pearls. I covet nine more. I am Greek enough to know I must pay a usurer’s price.”

“No, you may give them back.”

Tros held his hand out. Zeuxis poured the pearls into their little leather bag and slipped it into a pocket underneath his sleeve, where no one would have suspected a pocket might be hidden.

“What do you propose? A revolution?” he asked. “That would bring Cæsar down on us. He conquers Gaul for money and to make himself a reputation. He corrupts Rome into anarchy so as to have the city at his mercy when the time comes. I could guarantee to start a tumult the day after to-morrow, but as to the consequences —”

“If Cæsar should descend on Rome, he could not also invade Britain,” Tros answered.

“But you might destroy Rome. Pompeius Magnus hates luxury and corruption — for other people. There is nothing too good for himself. He would rally the patricians to fight Cæsar’s faction to the death. That might mean ruin for all of us. I am a parasite. I fatten on rich men’s ignorance. There would be plenty of ignorance but no wealth after a civil war, whichever side should win.”

“Let Rome rot. Who spoke of revolution?” Tros retorted. “I am here with thirty men to find some way of bridling Cæsar. I would not give one pearl to buy a Roman mob. They would sell themselves for two pearls to the next man, and for three pearls to a third. But I have bought you, Zeuxis! Tell me how to put a stick in Cæsar’s wheel.”

Zeuxis studied Tros’s face over a goblet’s rim.

"I prefer not to be crucified," he answered. "There is only one way to control Rome—through a woman."

Tros exploded. His snort was like a bison's when it spurns the turf.

"No truck with women! Let Cæsar manage the senate with his presents to the cuckolds' wives. I play a man's game."

*"Fortuna ludum insolentem ludit!"\**

Zeuxis filled his goblet, smiled and let the lamp-light show the color of the wine.

"Ptolemy the Piper, king of Egypt, is a drunkard," he remarked. "I said nothing about women. I said 'through a woman!'"

"Lord Zeus!"

"But the very gods and goddesses love one another, Tros. However we may think of women in the mass, one woman brought you into the world and one bore me. One woman supplies the key to any situation. For instance, Cæsar's daughter has kept him and Pompey from each other's throats."

"I will not stoop to such practices," Tros answered.

"I have known men who were forced to rise to them!" said Zeuxis. "I only mentioned Julia by way of illustration. She is too ill to be of any use to us. I was thinking of another woman—Helene, daughter of Theseus, a musician, who came with old King Ptolemy from Alexandria. She is the scandal and the admiration of all Rome. The sons of newly rich *equites* wear flowers filched from her garland and brawl about her in the streets, while their fathers defy even the Vestal Virgins in refusing to let her be expelled from Rome. Some say she is a spy for Ptolemy; others that she seeks revenge on Ptolemy and plots to send the Roman eagles into Egypt. The truth is, she has genius and seeks enjoyment. She adores sensation. It was she who posed to Timonides of Corinth for the new statue of the Venus Genetrix; his workshop was so thronged with visitors that he removed the un-

\*"Fortune plays an *insolent* game."



finished statue all the way to Tarentum, but when he did that she refused to go there and the statue is still unfinished. She rides a gilded litter, as she isn't a slave and they can't prevent it. Recently she offered to drive her own *quadriga* in the races. When the ædile refused to permit that she offered to fight Juma, the Nubian gladiator. Some think she might have beaten him, but the Vestal Virgins would not hear of such scandalous proceeding. She understands that stirring of desire is much more profitable than to satisfy it. For a pearl or two we might persuade her to amuse herself immensely for our benefit. By Heracles, I have it!"

Zeuxis rose dramatically, one hand raised, as if he plucked a great idea from the ether, but Tros watched him without enthusiasm.

"Let us send the girl to Cæsar."

"Trash!" Tros answered. "I could dig that thought from any dunghill. Cæsar is not Paris, son of Priam — he is Cæsar. He would take, but the woman is not born who can seduce him. Cæsar smiles once, and the craftiest surrender to him like ice to the sun. I know him. Five times I have met him, and he — almost — won — me! I admire his brilliance. He has intellect. He recognizes strength on the instant, or weakness equally. He can read men's character as I read wind and sea; and he can use the rogue or the weakling as I use puffs of wind to fill my sails. But he prefers to match his strength against the strongest, even as I love conquering the storms. Five times I have met him. Three times I have beaten him. Each time he has offered me command of all his fleet. I laughed."

"I remember your father also was mad," remarked Zeuxis. "Why in the name of all the mysteries of death should you reject the friendship of a man like Cæsar? That is a wanton waste of golden opportunity! And you a Greek from Samothrace! Have you not sense enough to realize that fortune favors Cæsar? Will you flaunt your prejudices in the face of Providence? I tell you, Cæsar will inevitably be master

of the world unless an accident prevents."

"Then let my name be Accident," said Tros.

"In the name of the immortal gods who turned their backs on Hellas when the Romans came, let us be the wise men and swim with the tide!" Zeuxis urged. "You and I are not heroes. Cæsar is. We might destroy him, as I have seen dogs drag down men in the arena, but the dogs did not turn into men; nor should we become Cæsars. Tros, I tell you, we should let this Cæsar burst a breach for us in fortune's walls and follow in with him. Success is sweet! I drink to it! Failure is bitter; lo, I hurl my dregs at it! Men live longest who know enough to follow fortune's favorites."

Tros snorted, thumping a fist down on his thigh. He glared at Zeuxis as if eyes could burn him up.

"Aye, gods have turned their backs on Hellas. She is dead. I live!" he answered. "I measure life by strength of living, not by days and nights and lustrums. Failure? A beached fish for it! Riches? There isn't a rogue in Rome who mayn't be as rich as Crassus if he has the luck. What is worth having in this life? Dignity and friendship, Zeuxis! Courage to stand by a friend! Vision and will! The choosing between right and wrong! The pluck to take the weaker side — the obstinacy to persist — rebellion against the wrong thing — action! Those are life!"

"Then why not be the friend of Cæsar?" Zeuxis argued. "Friendship should not be squandered on unworthy people. If choosing is the gist of life, choose wisely! Cæsar will give you action; and if the apparently weaker side amuses you, choose his. He is all-powerful in Gaul, no doubt; but here in Italy Pompeius Magnus has the gage of him at present — or so the senate thinks, and so think nearly all the *equites* and the patricians — and so thinks Crassus, or he never would have gone to Asia to try to wrest a triumph from the Parthians. Select the cause that seems the weaker at the moment; then — success? — suppose we call it opportunity for further effort.

You are a young man. You may outlive Cæsar. It would be no mean memory that you were Cæsar's friend. If he should have rewarded you —"

"With what?" Tros interrupted. "Money? The stolen gold of Gaul! Employment? Holding in subjection ravished provinces, or possibly offstanding pirates who are no worse than himself and only seek to glean where Cæsar harvested! Honors? He has no honor. He has avarice, energy, skill; he can arouse the sentiment of pauper-soldiers driven from their farms by cheap slave-labor enslaved by himself from looted provinces. But honor? He serves out honors as he feeds his legions, from the commissariat. He keeps faith when it pays him, and because it pays."

"By the forsaken gods of Hellas, Tros, I think we all do that," said Zeuxis. "You have paid me to keep faith with you; and since you whetted my discretion with one gesture of royal extravagance, why not confide in me a little? You spoke of a ship. Where is the ship? Where did you land in Italy?"

"I landed at Tarentum. My ship is at sea," Tros answered. "She will come for me to Ostia, where Conops shall quarter himself in order to hurry to me with the news of her arrival. I found me a pilot in Gades who knows Roman waters; and I have a Northman in charge of the ship, whom I trust because he and I fought until we learned the temper of each other's steel."

"Cæsar has a way of knowing what his enemies are doing. Does he know you are in Rome?" asked Zeuxis.

"He knew I left Gades for Rome. I had a brush with him in Gades. I won from him authority to use all Roman ports. I have a letter from him, signed and sealed."

"He knows you are his enemy?"

"He does."

"Then that letter is worth exactly the price of damaged parchment! I suppose you haven't heard how Cato proposed to the senate to revive Rome's reputation by sending Cæsar in fetters to the Usipetes

and Tencteri. Cæsar broke his word to them and violated the law of nations; but how much support do you suppose Cato aroused? Men simply laughed. There is only one way to win influence in Rome — that is, purchase it in one way or another. If you buy with money in advance, the danger is that your opponent will out-buy you. Besides, how can you compete with Cæsar? His agents Balbus and Oppius have spent sixty million sesterces in buying up old buildings alone, to enlarge the Forum. Prices — any price at all; but ‘Vote for Cæsar!’ If any senator wants money he goes through the farce of selling a house or some worthless work of art to Cæsar at an enormous price, so as to avoid conviction of receiving bribes. The plunder from Gaul provides work at unheard-of wages for the artisans, who would undoubtedly accept your bribe but would also continue to pocket Cæsar’s wages; they look to Cæsar to go on enriching them forever, whereas you would only be a momentary opportunity.

“The better method is to entertain them, which is almost equally expensive. You would find the competition deadly. But there is this to be said; the mob will be faithful as long as nine days to whoever gives it a good thrill. After that you must think of another new thrill — and another one. Keep Rome entertained and you may even nominate her consuls.”

Tros rose from his seat on the window-ledge and paced the room, his hands behind him and the muscles of his forearms standing out like knotted cords.

“You know Cato?” he demanded.

“Surely. Only recently he had me driven from his door. I represent the decadence he makes his reputation by denouncing — the ungrateful, vain, old-fashioned snarler! He is the best man in Rome and politically the most contemptible, because he means exactly what he says and keeps his promises. Pin no hopes on Cato.”

“Cicero?”

“He owes me money for his new house. I have a little influence with him. But he is much more

heavily in debt to Cæsar. Cicero measures gratitude by bulk; he will even praise bad poetry if rich men write it."

"Marcus Antonius?"

"Profligate — drunk — insatiable — rash — a Heracles with a golden voice, in love with popularity. He knows how to win the mob's plaudits — and at present he favors Cæsar."

"Have you the ear of Pompey?"

"Nobody has. He has the best taste of any man in Rome, so he is naturally disgusted with politics. He glooms in his country villa, where even senators are turned away. Pompey half imagines himself superhuman but half doubts whether his good luck will continue. I believe he is losing his grip on himself. He recently refused to be made dictator on the ground that there is no need for one, but I think the fact is, he has no policy and doesn't know what to do. His wife is ill, and if she should die he might come out into the open as Cæsar's enemy, but at present he makes a show of friendship for him."

"His intimates flatter him out of his senses; and because of his easy success in the war against the pirates and his aristocratic air of keeping his intentions to himself he is the most feared man in Rome. But the mob believes Cæsar will bring fabulously rich loot out of Britain, which makes the moment inauspicious to oppose Cæsar; and though Pompey loathes the rabble he likes their votes. Who wouldn't? Also, I think he honestly dreads a civil war, which would be inevitable if he should announce himself as Cæsar's enemy. You have no chance with Pompey."

Tros came and stood in front of Zeuxis, frowning down at him, ignoring a proffered goblet of wine.

"Have you the ear of any one in Rome who would serve my purpose?" he demanded.

"I have told you — Helene of Alexandria."

Tros snorted again, but Zeuxis went on:

"At the moment she is keeping rather quiet because three days ago two factions of young fools fought



about her with their daggers in the Forum. Two sons of *equites* were killed and half-a-dozen badly hurt. Cato was furious. She must be nearly bursting after three days' seclusion. She likes me because — well, to be candid with you — she influences business and draws fat commissions. The best advice I can give you is to see Helene."

Tros scowled and stroked his chin.

"To-morrow morning. Why not? It will be a novelty that will stir her craving for amusement. You arrive at the door of her villa with a handsome young barbarian prince, exactly at the moment when she is ready to burn the house over her head with boredom. Flatter her — amuse her — praise her — bribe her — and she will ruin Cæsar for you if it is possible to do it."

Tros groaned aloud, shaking his fists at the painted ceiling—

"O Almighty Zeus, am I never to be disentangled from the schemes of women?"

"You are forgetting Leda and the swan," said Zeuxis. "Even Father Zeus himself has had entanglements at times!"

## Chapter XXI

### HELENE

*I have seen many a man ape humility by magnifying the importance of his office and denying his own claim to be more than a servant. But his office is what he makes it, as a ship is what her builder makes her and behaves as her master directs. If a ship's crew is unseamanly, I know her master's character, no matter what his chastity of homage to the ill luck that he bids me witness. If I see a city foul with lewdness, I know its rulers' character, no matter what*

*their mouthings about the sancity of office and the grandeur of their institutions.*

From The Log of Tros of Samothrace

Three hours before dawn Tros awoke Orwic to discuss proposals with him.

"Cato is the noblest Roman of them all. He is incorruptible. This woman Helene is Rome's paramour. Cato's party is in contempt because it is old-fashioned and honest. Which shall it be? Shall we attack Rome's weakness or ally ourselves to strength?"

"Try both!" Orwic murmured sleepily. "What difference does it make to me? I know no Latin. I can neither make love to a woman nor address the senate! It appears I can't drink! That fellow Zeuxis' wine has made my head feel like a copper kettle."

Orwic fell asleep again. Tros went to his own room, where he lay cudgeling his brains. He could foresee nothing. It was possible he was in danger of his life, equally possible that Cæsar's enemies might leap at every opportunity and stage a demonstration that should force Cæsar to abandon his attempt on Britain. Should he adopt a subtle course or the direct one of appealing bluntly to such men as Cato, Cicero and Pompey?

Zeuxis, on the other hand, with pearls in mind, sent a slave with a letter in haste to Helene's villa. Three hours after daybreak two of her litters, borne by slaves in her livery and with a eunuch in attendance, waited in front of Zeuxis' porch.

By that time Zeuxis and his guests had breakfasted under the awning in the fountained courtyard. Already Zeuxis was deep in his affairs — mercurial, excited — giving orders to his foreman in an office whose walls were hidden behind drawings and sheaves of estimates. There was a staff of nine slaves busy figuring at long desks. A stream of tradesmen and subcontractors poured in and out, all chattering. But Zeuxis abandoned business when he heard that those litters had come.

"Tros, fortune smiles on us!"

He ordered his own chariot brought — an extremely plain affair, unpainted, drawn by mules.

“Lest I arouse cupidity! My customers would be annoyed if I looked rich. Rome is still a strait-laced city — except for the rich Romans!”

Refusing to explain, he almost dragged Tros into the first litter and waved Orwic into the other. Tros found himself on scented cushions behind embroidered silk\* curtains through which he could see but remain unseen. An escort of men armed with staves went before and behind and a eunuch, modestly arrayed, but strutting like a peacock, led the way — for a while in the dust of Zeuxis’ chariot. Zeuxis drove full pelt to have a first word with the lady who had sent the litters, and was shortly out of sight.

They passed into the city through a swarming crowd of slaves and merchants, skirted the Mons Palatinus by a smelly street between brick houses, crossed the Tiber by a wooden bridge, where slaves of the *municipium* stood guard at either end to put out fires and regulate the traffic, and emerged into a zone of trans-Tiberian villas, where hardly a house was visible because of densely planted trees and high walls, and the only gaudy ostentation was displayed on decorated gate-posts. There was much less traffic over-river, although chariots, often preceded by men on horseback and usually followed by breathless slaves on foot were driven recklessly, their drivers shouting to foot-passengers to clear the way; and there were countless slaves carrying provisions and merchandise for sale. There were no armed men in evidence, but the high walls of the villas suggested fortifications and the general impression was of jealously guarded privacy.

The villa occupied, but not owned, by Helene faced the Tiber between higher walls than ordinary, above which the trees had been topped to make them

\* There was quite a large trade in silk from China by way of Socotra and Alexandria.

spread into impenetrable masks of dusty green. On the high gate-posts were portraits in color intended to convey a sort of family likeness of the succession of Romans who had owned the place — and lost it to a money-lender, from whom Helene had rented it.

Her slaves were at the gate, all liveried. An impudent Cyprian eunuch, in canary-colored robes and wearing his mistress' portrait on a copper disk hung from his neck, commanded that the gate be opened, saluting the litters as they passed in, but tempering civility with a leer that made Tros's blood boil; and almost before the gate had slammed again his squeaky voice was raised in vinegary comment on the impatience of the slave of certain *equites* who sought admission with letters and gifts to be delivered into the fair Alexandrian's hand.

"Tell your masters that my mistress will receive gifts when it pleases her. Has none brought any gifts for me? What sort of persons are your masters? Paupers? Plebes? Ignoramuses? What are they?"

The villa was built in the style that had grown fashionable when the Roman legions had brought their plunder home from Greece. It was faced with columns looted from a temple in Bœotia. Stolen statues — fawns, Bacchantes, Naiads — grinned, danced and piped under every group of trees, so that the grounds looked like the entrance to an art museum; it would have taxed even the ingenuity of a Roman money-lender to find room for one more proof that culture can be dragged in with a team of oxen.

But within there was something like taste, although the cornices were far too richly ornamented and the paintings on the walls were garish. Some woman's hand had draped the place with Babylonian embroidery, so rich that it challenged attention and threw over-crowded elegance into comparative obscurity. The art of Alexandria had overlaid confusion of design.

However, there was no time to admire the hangings. There was laughter, the echoing clash of weapons

and the thumps of bare feet leaping on a marble floor. There was a glimpse along a marble corridor of gardens leading to the Tiber. The eunuch drew aside embroidered curtains to reveal a sunlit court surrounded by a balcony. Young Romans lounged against the columns, laughing and applauding; in the midst of one side Zeuxis sat amid a group of women, to whom he appeared to be giving intricate instructions. In the midst of the mosaic, sunlit floor, half-naked and aglow with exercise, Helene fought with net and trident against a Nubian armed with a blunted sword. There were great red splotches on her skin where he had smitten her, but he was backing away warily, circling toward her to keep clear of the sharpened trident that she held in her hand.

Suddenly, as Tros strode in, she lunged with the trident. The Nubian dodged and tried to smite her with the flat of his short weapon. She ducked, leaped, cast her net and caught him, spinning her trident and driving its blunt end with a thump against his ribs. Then, clinging to her rope, she spun herself around him, keeping him tight in the toils and prodding him until he yelled for mercy while the onlookers shouted applause.

*"Hic habet! Punish him! Don't spare him!"*

She did not cease until the Nubian went down on his back and she had put her foot on him, holding up her trident in imitation of a victor at the games, amid cries of "Kill him!" — "No, wait — whose gladiator is he? He might cost too much." — "I'll pay for him. Go on, Helene — see if you can kill him with the trident — only one thrust, mind! — it isn't so simple as it looks."

She laughed down at the gladiator, breathless, prodded him again and turned away — caught sight of Tros and Orwic with their backs to the curtained entrance, and came running to them.

"Which is the king's nephew? Which is Tros?" She looked at Orwic longest as he took her in his arms and kissed her; which was perfect British manners but, to



put it mildly, unconventional in Rome. The sons of Roman *equites* roared their astonishment, loosing noisy volleys of jests, but Orwic kept her in his arms and kissed her three times before she could break free.

"*This* is the king's nephew!" she assured them in a strident laughing voice that made the courtyard ring. "The other—"

Tros raised up his hand in greeting and the banter ceased. He was dressed as a Roman; except for the gold band on his forehead and the length of his raven hair he might have been a Roman of the old school, conscious of the debt he owed his ancestors.

"— this other doubtless is the uncle!" said Helene. "I expected Tros of Samothrace. All hail, thou king of an end of the earth! Helene welcomes you to Rome, where even Ptolemy had to wait on Cato's doorstep! Isis! You have dignity! What muscle! Do you seek a queen, most terrifying majesty? Or is the nephew to be married? I abase myself!"

She curtsied to the marble floor, the rhythm of her movements bringing a burst of applause from the gilded youths, who cried to her to repeat it, some urging her to dance — all anxious to attract her attention to themselves. Zeuxis left the women who surrounded him and, stepping forward into the sunlight, cried out:

"Pardon, mistress! Noblemen, your pardon! This is the most noble Tros of Samothrace. His friend is a royal prince whose name is Orwic."

"Not a king?" Helene gasped in mock astonishment. "Lord Tros, that Greek fool told me *you* were no more than a sailor! Kings go to Rome's back-doors, but I see you are neither a fool of a king nor a louse with a vote for sale!"

Again she curtsied, three times, throwing back the dark hair from her forehead with a toss that suggested blossoms nodding in the wind. Then —

"*Equites!*" she cried, addressing the youths who had begun to swarm around her. "Favor me by entertaining them until I have bathed and dressed."

She ran off through a door between two Doric columns, followed by the women who had been surrounding Zeuxis. Zeuxis came forward again and introduced the Romans, reeling off their names as each one bowed with almost perfect insolence, restrained, however, within bounds by recognition of Tros's strength of character and muscle and air of being somebody who might have influence. They tried to talk to Orwic, but, as he could not understand them and disguised embarrassment behind an air of aristocratic boredom, they were obliged by curiosity to turn to Tros again.

"I am from Hispania," he answered, telling half the truth. "I have brought despatches from your imperator Cæsar," he added, which was more than half an untruth. "To the senate? No. What would Cæsar say to the senate?"

They all laughed at that. Whatever their opinions of Cæsar, none pretended that he held the senate in respect. They began to ask news of Cæsar, eagerly inquiring what the prospect was of his invading Britain and how true it might be that the Britons made their common cooking-pots of gold. So Tros seized opportunity and told them about Britain, saying it was nothing but a miserable, foggy island full of trees, where no wealth was and the inhabitants fought valiantly because there was nothing to make peace endurable.

"Then why does Cæsar talk of invasion?" they protested.

"Possibly he talks of one thing and intends another," Tros retorted. "It is known that he prepares an army, and I have heard something about ships. However, which way will to-morrow's wind blow? How many miles from Gaul to Rome? If I were a young Roman I would watch to see Pompey's eagles gather. These are wild times. Stranger things might happen than that Cæsar should propose to himself to seize Rome."

But such talk only vaguely interested them. They

had the absolute contempt for politics peculiar to rich men's sons. The youngest of them had seen the mob made use of to reduce itself into submission. They had all heard gossip about Cæsar. They considered Pompey vastly his superior. However, Cæsar had significance.

"Cæsar has sent three more shiploads of wild animals from Gaul," said one of them. "There are to be games to celebrate his recent victories. They are to surpass anything ever seen in the Circus Maximus. Crassus' agents have sent bears from Asia. There will be nine elephants. From Africa Jugurtha has sent fifty coal-black savages from the interior, who look fit to fight even our best gladiators. And there are two hundred and ten criminals in the dungeons, some of them women; they talk of slaughtering the lot in one mêlée — give them a taste of the hot iron, and a spear or something to defend themselves, and turn the wild beasts loose on them! There is rumor of a promise of freedom for the last man and the last woman left alive — but that may be only talk to make them try hard."

An older man, Servilius Ahenobarbus, waxed scornful:

"Any one in his senses would rather see two good gladiators fight than watch a thousand people butchered," he objected. "Fie on you, Publius! Are you degenerating? Such stuff is all very well for the rabble. I can smell them in my nostrils as I think of it! Can't you hear the snarl and then the yelp as they watch women being ripped by a bull? Cæsar has sent bulls from Hispania. But you forget the best part — two days' chariot racing."

"*Phaugh!* A safe and pretty spectacle for Vestal Virgins!" Publius sneered. "I have heard Britons fix swords to their chariot wheels. Now, if they would have a race — *quadrigas*, say — with swords fixed to the wheels, wolves loosed at the horses and fifty or sixty prisoners of war in the way, tied in groups, to escape if they could, I would call that a spectacle! Wait until I am old enough and they elect me *ædile!*"

"Ah! Then at last my turn will come! You will let me fight then, won't you, Publius?"

Helene danced forth from her dressing-room in a chlamys made of Chinese silk from Alexandria, with a wreath of crimson flowers in her hair and a girdle that flashed fire as its opals caught the sunlight. She was better looking clothed; the drapery softened the lines of her too athletic figure and the wreath offset the hardness of her eyes — delicious dark-gray eyes that, nevertheless, could only half conceal the calculation in their depths. She was mentally weighing Tros.

She turned suddenly toward the Romans, laughing in their faces:

"*Nobiles*, who loves me? Who will hurry to the slave-market and buy Thracian grooms for my white team? Those Armenians I have are useless; I will sell them for farm-work."

There was a race to be first to find suitable Thracian slaves. The Roman youths cut short the courtesies and ran to find their chariots. Helene took Tros by the hand.

"And now those fools have gone we may talk wisdom," she said, looking almost modest. "Zeuxis tells me you have come from Britain and desire my influence — although I have not altogether understood him. Come."

She led into a room which formerly had been the atrium, which she had refurnished and disguised with hangings until it resembled nothing Tros had ever seen. There was crimson cloth with golden dragons; there were gilded cornices and curtains made from beads of ivory; the feet sank silently into rugs of amber and old-rose; the couches, the chairs and the very foot-stools were of ivory inlaid with gold. There was a smell of incense.

"Go!" she ordered, and the lurking slaves vanished.

Tros prodded the hangings. He opened a closet. He drew back the curtains that covered a doorway. He

looked through the window and listened for breathing from behind some potted shrubbery through which he could not see. Then, striding to where she had thrown herself on an Egyptian couch of ivory and crimson cloth, he looked down at her dark eyes and, with his hands behind him, challenged her:

"I heard you say you wish to fight. Do you desire to fight me? With any weapon? With your wits?"

She shuddered.

"You look too much like Zeus!" she answered, rallying her impudence. "I understand you came to ask a favor of me."

"Whose slave are you?" he demanded.

She sat upright suddenly. She tried to look indignant but her eyes betrayed her; there was fear in their depths. She nearly spat the answer at him.

"I was born free! I am the daughter of Theseus the musician —"

"And was Theseus free?"

She nodded. Words were choking in her throat. Her fingers moved as if she sought a weapon.

"Since when were the musicians at the court of Ptolemy free men?" Tros asked. "I have seen you dancing at the court of Ptolemy. You are the girl who danced when Ptolemy Auletes played the flute. Are you Ptolemy's slave?"

"I am free!" she insisted. Coiled on the couch, looking up at him, she suggested a snake in the act of striking. All the laughter was gone from her eyes, all her impudence.

"I am a silent man," said Tros. "I listen."

He began to pace the floor, his hands behind him, presenting his broad back toward her as he turned, to give her time to recover her self-possession; but she had no sooner regained a little of it than he snatched it from her, to convert it to his own use.

"Understand!" He stood in front of her again. "No panic-stricken yielding that broods treachery! Use reason. Judge me, whether I am one whom you can



sway; or whether I am one who will betray you, if you keep good faith."

"Master of men, you are cruel!"

"I am just," Tros answered. "I will do you no harm if you yield to me."

"My body?" Her eyes lightened; her lips quivered in the faint suggestion of a smile.

"That for it!" He snapped his fingers. Instantly her whole expression changed; resentful, sullen.

"What then?" she asked. "Yield what?"

"Your secret!"

"I have no secret. I am the daughter of—"

He stopped her with a gesture. "Shall I go?" he asked, and turned toward the door.

She flinched at the veiled threat—sprang from the couch and stood between him and the doorway.

"I have influence," she said. "I dare to fight you one way or the other! Knife against knife, or cunning against cunning! If we make a bargain, you shall keep you share of it or—"

Tros thrust his thumb into the little pocket in his tunic and drew out a pearl of the size of a pea—a rosy, lustrous thing that looked incongruous as he rolled it on the palm of his enormous hand. She curled her lip scornfully.

"I could have pearls from Pompey. I can have anything in Rome my heart desires."

But Tros produced another one, and then a third. Her eyes changed subtly, though she still defied him, standing like an Amazon at bay. Tros was watching her eyes.

"I gave nine of these to Zeuxis. You shall have eighteen."

"For my secret?"

"No. I know your secret. There is only one man who would dare to risk burning his fingers in your flame. You are Cæsar's spy."

"Liar! Rabirius sent me to Rome!"

Tros laughed. Rabirius was Cæsar's money-lender—possibly a third as rich as Crassus, with perhaps a

thirtieth of Crassus' manhood — an avaricious rat with brains enough to recognize his limitations and not vie with great men but play into their hands and pocket fabulous commissions.

"Sit down!" Tros commanded, pointing to the couch. He returned the pearls to his pocket. Then, as she obeyed him, "Judge whether I know your secret."

She set her elbows on her knees and clasped her chin, staring at Tros as if he were a prophet reading off her destiny.

"Cæsar will need limitless fountains of money when he makes his bid to be the master of the world. He invaded Gaul to make a reputation and for practice in playing off men against men. He married his daughter to Pompey to keep Pompey quiet. He encouraged Crassus to make war on Parthia, that Crassus might bleed Italy of men and leave none but Pompey and the idle rich to stand between him and ambition. Seeing far into the future, he sent agents into Egypt who should stir the Alexandrians against their king. So the Alexandrians drove out Ptolemy; but it was too soon; Cæsar was not ready. Who was it then but Cæsar who, in return for a promise of seventeen million sesterces, agreed to defy the Roman senate and send Gabinius with troops from Syria to restore Ptolemy to the throne, along with Rabirius to control Ptolemy's exchequer? Now you say you are the agent of Rabirius. That may be. But I think you are the slave of Caius Julius Cæsar."

"What if I were? Is that your affair?" she answered.

"Aye! Cæsar might learn too easily what I intend! You may report to him about Rabirius. You may tell him all the secrets of these young patricians who babble their fathers' treacheries in your ears. But concerning me you will be as silent as the tomb in which they bury Vestal Virgins."

"Cæsar," she said, "is a terrible man to trifle with."

Tros nodded.

"Aye. I know him. His slaves keep watch on one another as well as on such Romans as he mistrusts

and such provincials as he hopes to use. But since the gods, against my will, have guided me to your house, you shall run that risk of not informing Cæsar!"

"You will injure him?" she asked.

"Nay. I will let him conquer Rome and leave the Britons to themselves!"

"You are his friend?"

"I am here to save Britain from Cæsar."

Helene stood up, laughing, her eyes blazing. She defied him:

"Do you dare to kill me in my own house? How else shall you gag me now I know your secret?"

"Gag you? I will make you garrulous!" Tros answered. "You shall find a way to make me famous in a city where such infamy abounds that no voice can be heard above the din! To Cæsar you shall send word that Tros of Samothrace has prophesied Rome shall be his. Vanity may make him think he has persuaded me at last to love him."

"Many honest men love Cæsar," said Helene.

"Aye, and many love you," Tros answered, "but not I. You shall have your choice of playing my game or explaining what you are, and why you are in Rome, to Cato. Now choose!"

"Cato?" she answered. "Are you of Cato's party?"

"No," he answered, "but I have a speech for Cato's ear that shall include you one way or another. Shall I say you are the agent of Rabirius and Cæsar's spy — for I can prove it to him! — or —"

"Say Helene is your friend," she answered. "Cato is an old fool, but he is dangerous."

She looked keenly into Tros's eyes, and then laughed with a little breathless catch of nervousness:

"Tros, few in Rome would not like to say Helene is —"

"I am one of those few," Tros interrupted.

"Did you never love a woman?" she asked curiously. His blunt rejection of her offer pleased her. By the light in her gray eyes he knew that she had made up her mind to conquer him.

"I am of Samothrace."

As he intended, she jumped to the conclusion he was an initiate under a vow to refrain from women.

"I will show you deeper mysteries than the Samothracian," she said with a confident toss of her chin and a laugh that had hypnotized many a man. "If I trust you, you must trust me."

"I have pearls. And you will do well to obey me," Tros retorted. "Be alone when I return from interviewing Cato."

## Chapter XXII

### MARCUS PORCIUS CATO

*There are some men so enamored by a half-seen truth that they devote their energy to quarreling with untruth rather than to proving the little they do know. They are like slaves with fans, who drive out through one window flies that return through another. Stern men and unforgiving, they are so intent on punishing the evil-doer that they have not time to practise magnanimity. Such men forget, or never knew, that cruelty and justice mix no better than fire and water, but that one extinguishes the other, leaving cruelty or justice. I have never seen one such man, who favored mercy rather than his own delight in the importance of his fear of self-respect. Self-importance gives them no time for importance.*

From The Log of Tros of Samothrace

Nowhere on earth was it easier to make mistakes than in Rome, nor more difficult to recover from them. It was a city where a man might do almost anything, including murder, with impunity, provided he went about it according to precedent and did lip-service to institutions and conventions. Above all, a foreigner needed discretion. Too often foreigners had trailed

behind the chariots of Roman generals, in the celebration of those triumphs over foreigners that made Rome affluent; too many thousands of alien slaves were doing the work of animals and pandering to Rome's depravity; it was too usual to attribute treachery to foreigners in order to provide excuse for new campaigns, and it behooved the alien to study his deportment shrewdly, with an eye not only to the mob's continuously cultivated craving for excitement, but also to the prejudices of the privileged. Privilege was of the essence of Rome's government.

Aware of all that, nevertheless, Tros fell immediately foul of custom. Wishing to avoid curiosity that Orwic, with his fair moustache and unusual manners, almost certainly would have aroused, he accepted the use of Helene's litters and her personal attendants to convey him to the Forum, where Zeuxis assured him he would almost certainly find Cato.

He was conscious of having offended Zeuxis by not permitting him to overhear the conversation with Helene. He knew the Greek's mercurial temperament, as capable of malice as of generosity and of leaping in a moment from one extreme to its opposite. But he did not expect Zeuxis' resentment to be quite so swift. The malicious smile with which Zeuxis watched him get into the extravagantly decorated litter made no impression on him at the time.

"You will cause quite a flutter in Cato's bosom. There is nothing like a favorable introduction!" said the Greek.

And for a while it looked as if Zeuxis had meant exactly what he said. As the litters approached the city they became the objects of such attention that the liveried slaves had hard work to make progress through the crowd. Helene's notoriety had not been lessened, nor her popularity diminished by the recent brawling in the Forum for the right to walk beside her litter through the streets. Her recent offer to fight with net and trident in the Circus Maximus had



become common gossip; it had been nobody's affair to circulate the news that the authorities had instantly forbidden such a scandalous proceeding. The crowd wanted to be scandalized and gloated at the prospect of Helene's doing it.

It was known too, that she had a four-horse team to enter in the races that would precede the three days' butchery of men and beasts in the arena; the possibility that she might drive the team herself had raised her popularity to fever-heat. The mere sight of her well-known litter forcing its way toward the Capitol was enough to block the narrow streets and draw attention even from the orators who were trying to work the crowd into electioneering frenzy whenever there was room for fifty men to stand and listen.

It was easy to see out through the litter-curtains, although next thing to impossible to recognize the litter's occupant, so all the way to the Forum Tros received the adulation that would have amused and thrilled Helene to the marrow of her being. It disgusted Tros. He loathed it. It revolted him to have to use a woman's notoriety to further his own plans. But it seemed safer to trust to Helene's influence than to make experiments with Rome's senators, or senators' wives, who might be less notorious but not less treacherous. No one — probably not even Cæsar — knew the long reach of Cæsar's spies and Cæsar's money.

But he hated the scent of the goose-breast-feather cushions. The stifling city smells annoyed him and the din of city traffic — street-vendors' cries, the tumult of electioneering factions skilfully incited to frenzy by men whose only claim to public office was cupidity and the ability to pay the necessary bribes, yells of the charioteers who found the street blocked, clangor of the armorers in dim basement workshops, hoarse pleadings of the auctioneers disposing of the loot from far-off provinces, shouts of the public announcers, the yelping of dogs and the overtone, blended of all of it:

“Buy! Buy! Buy!”

Rome was for sale to the craftiest bidder. That was the key to the din. The offspring of seventy races were hawking their hearts in the market, to the buyer with the keenest brain and longest pocketbook.

Midsummer heat had driven all who could afford it to the seaside or to mountain villas — that, and bed-bugs incubated in the crowded, dark slave-quarters and the rack-rent tenements. The orators were well dressed. There were *equites* in dusty chariots arriving post-haste from the country to investigate alarming rumors, but the crowd had the shabby, ill-tempered appearance it assumes so swiftly when the fashionable element withdraws. Hot nights and too much politics — slaves overworked and free men unemployed — enormous and increasing wealth of one class, poverty, and irresponsibility increasing for the other — corn-doles, open bribery, free entertainment at the expense of demagogues — postponement of the elections because the senate was afraid of mob-rule — Cæsar’s agrarian laws designed to curry favor with the populace, and the impossibility of enforcing them in the face of the landowners’ opposition, or of earning a living on the land in competition with the cheap slave-labor of the large estates, had all combined to arouse irritation, uncertainty and the expectation of a riot such as even Rome had never seen. Almost the air itself seemed ready to take fire. Men’s faces wore the ugly look that preceded violence.

And Rome herself was ugly — drab with the color of smoky bricks and vegetable refuse — ugliness enhanced by the beginnings of adornment. There was marble here and there; and there were statues, some decapitated, some half hidden under crudely smeared electioneering posters, that suggested dignity forgotten. From between its ugly wooden scaffolding the marble of Pompey’s enormous new theater shone in the baking sunlight, hinting at the only method by which Rome was likely to emerge out of her filth. It was against the law to build a theater of anything but

wood; so, as all men knew, including they who should enforce the law, Pompey was building behind screens of wood that should be torn down in a night at last and lay bare a magnificent defiance of the law. And all men knew that none, unless possibly Cato, would dare to call Pompey in question. Men laughed at the senate's helplessness, while they reviled the senate for not fostering tradition.

As the litters neared the Forum, where the shop-fronts and the open wine-shops looked drab in the dust from buildings being torn down by Cæsar's agents and the thud of falling masonry resounded like the tumult of a siege, the crowd grew denser. Roofs, temple steps, the shop-fronts, upper windows, all were thronged with agitated sightseers, some crying out the names of candidates for public office, some reviling Cato, others — evidently led by unseen agents — shouting for Pompeius Magnus and dictatorship.

The crowd was so dense that even two lictors preceding a prætor's deputy were brought to a halt. Rather than challenge the crowd in that temper they preferred to follow the two litters, for which the crowd made way. They recognized Helene's livery and there began to be an ovation. One of those strange moods that capture crises spread like a contagion; there was humor in the thought of humoring Helene, who had to stay at home three days because of gross infractions of the public peace of which she was the cause, and of dishonoring the prætor's representative.

The crowd, it seemed, was there to vilify the prætor — to inspire him with such dread as should prevent him from interfering with electioneering bribery. They began yelping at the lictors and at the sacred official who strode behind them with his toga concealing the lower half of his face. Then suddenly some genius conceived the thought that Helene had been arrested and was being brought before the prætor for examination. Mockery turned to anger.

That was interference with the citizens' amusement and intolerable.

"Rescue her!"

The shout came from an upper window. It was echoed by a hundred voices from the street. Stones began flying, picked from the débris of the houses Cæsar's agents were demolishing. An angry faction, seizing opportunity to pounce on their political opponents, surged between the litters and the prætor's representative and in a second there was a street fight raging. The two lictors, theoretically sacred in their persons, raised their fasces over the official's head and hurried him to safety in the nearest house, while a troop of young patricians, asking nothing better than excuse to terrorize the mob, charged on horseback from a side-street in the direction of the Capitol. They were only armed with daggers but they swept the mob in front of them, and in a sort of back-eddy formed by that onslaught the two litters swayed into the Forum, where the bearers set them down beside a statue on which men swarmed and around which sweating men were packed like herrings in a barrel.

Tros emerged out of the litter and by sheer strength scuffled himself standing-room. He shouted to Orwic to stay where he was, but the Briton at the risk of daggers fought his way beside him. They were facing the temple of Castor and Pollux, whose platform was thronged with patricians, one of whom was trying to address the crowd while others roared for silence, and no single word could be distinguished from the din. There was a sea of arms and hot, excited faces where the patricians tried to win the mob's attention. On the opposite side of the Forum, where the shutters had been raised on money-changers' windows and every statue held its crowd of men like corpses on a gibbet, other orators were roaring themselves hoarse. There were cries of—

"Who defeated Spartacus?"

"Pompeius Magnus! Let him be dictator!"

"Who conquered Asia?"

"Pompeius Magnus!"

"Down with Cato! He assails our liberties!"

"Cæsar! Caius Julius Cæsar! The most generous, the most capable, the most glorious — Cæsar! Cæsar! Memmius!"

The last was Cæsar's candidate for consul.

Cheers, groans, cat-calls drowned the efforts of each faction to popularize their favorite. There were scuffles and fist-fights going on in thirty places simultaneously, but there was no room for a general mêlée; public peace was preserved by the utter impossibility of concerted action where men were fainting for lack of breathing room and could not rally to their friends or reach their enemies. A young patrician, standing high above the crowd's reach on the balustrade that flanked the temple platform, was amusing himself by flinging copper coins, but none dared stoop to pick them up for fear of being trampled underfoot. Six others in a group yelled "fire!" to try to cause a stampede, but that failed because it was impossible to move in any direction.

The only uninvaded steps were those of the prætor's office, guarded by a row of lictors, whose fasces, vertically held in front of them, were still such sacred symbols of Rome's majesty as even that crowd dared not violate. The building, wedged between the massive temple of Castor and Pollux and a smaller one, more delicately built, that showed the influence of Greece, was blunt, uncompromisingly Roman, dignified and solid, raised above the level of the Forum on a concrete base that formed the platform and provided cells for prisoners as well as offices. Its brick-work, unadorned since Sulla's day when the stucco had been damaged in the rioting and afterward removed entirely, gave a gloomy, ancient aspect to the building that was only partially brightened by the stucco columns recently erected to support a roof over the platform. On wooden boards on either side of the open door were public



proclamations, and on the platform was a table and a chair, but no man seated at it. That platform was the only vacant space in sight; even the bronze beaks of the rostra, at the Forum's farther end, were invisible behind a swaying sea of faces.

Suddenly the din ceased. There was silence as if Rome had caught her breath. The hammering of demolition stopped abruptly and the dense crowd swayed as every face was turned toward the door of the prætorium.

"Cato!"

It was a murmur, but it filled the Forum. He came slowly through the open door, the purple border of his toga emphasizing the dignity and matter-of-factness of his stride. He had a tablet in his right hand, which he studied, hardly glancing at the crowd, and he appeared entirely to ignore the half-a-dozen men who followed him, three on either hand. He was a round-headed, obstinate looking veteran, in contrast to their elegance and air of self-advertisement; the more they postured and acknowledged themselves conscious of the crowd, the greater seemed his dignity.

"Citizens!" he said abruptly. Even breathing ceased. There was a dead, flat silence — noncommittal. No man seemed to expect pleasantries. "It is your inalienable privilege to elect the officials of the Republic by ballot. However, certain individuals, ambitious to hold office for their private gain, have set the disgraceful example of bribery, corrupting public morals and preventing the election of such candidates as will not, for the sake of honesty, or can not purchase votes. This scandal I regard it as my duty to abolish. There shall be no bribery while I am prætor. I have caused to be deposited with me by each of these candidates for office whom you see before you a sum of money from his private fortune which would ruin any of them should he forfeit it. This money will be forfeited into the coffers of the state in the event of proof of bribery. so cast your ballots at the time of the election honorably, as becomes a Roman citizen,

each voting for that candidate who seems to him to merit confidence."

He made no gesture — simply turned, looked sharply at the six men on the platform, and strode sturdily in through the door.

There was a moment's silence, then a man laughed. Agitators, scattered at strategic intervals, cackled cynically until all the crowd was laughing. Cries from over near the rostra broke on the babeling din:

"This upstart believes he is Cato the Censor! He will abolish the games next! He will have us all eating turnips and wearing sack-cloth!"

But the crowd, as volatile as mercury, had seen the humor of the situation. It turned its laughter on the candidates for office, booing them until they followed Cato in a hurry. There was a surge then as men were hustled off the rostra to make room for orators who sought with shout and gesture to claim the crowd's attention. But the mob would have none of them; it began melting, pouring along the Via Sacra, spreading the news of Cato's masterstroke and carrying the din of laughter down the narrow streets until all Rome seemed aroar with monstrous humor. Before Tros could straighten out his clothing, mussed by the crush of the crowd, the whole Forum was empty except for groups of arguing politicians. All except two of the lictors retired, and they sat at ease on stools on either side of the prætorium door.

"They are used to squalls — well used to them!" said Tros, and taking Orwic by the arm he bade the litter-bearers follow him to the prætorium steps and wait there.

As he reached the top step he met Cato face to face. The Roman, with only one slave following, stopped, framed in the doorway and stared at him hard, then glanced at the sumptuous litters and their slaves in Egyptian livery.

"Those slaves are better dressed than many a Roman," he remarked, with a sarcastic gesture answering Tros's salute. "Who are you?"

"Prætor, I am Tros of Samothrace. I seek audience with you alone."

Cato's florid, stubborn face grew wrinkled as a dry smile stole along his lips.

"You are an alien," he said. "You think the business of Rome may wait while I listen to your importunities?"

"Aye, let Rome wait!" Tros answered. "Cæsar has the reins of fortune in his hand."

"You are Cæsar's messenger?"

"I am Tros of Samothrace and no man's messenger. I seek an audience with you."

"Enter."

Cato turned his back and led the way along a narrow passage into a square room lined with racks on which state documents were filed with parchment labels hanging from them. There were several chairs, two tables and one secretary, bowed over a manuscript. Cato dismissed the secretary. He stared, glanced suddenly at Orwic and sat down.

"Be brief," he said abruptly.

Tros made no haste. He studied him, mistrusting ordinary methods. There was nothing subtle about Cato; the man's elementary simplicity and downrightness expressed themselves in every line. His windy gray eyes, steady and keenly intelligent, betrayed unflinching will. His wrinkles spoke of hard experience. The iron-gray hair, worn short, suggested a pugnacity that was confirmed by the lines of mouth and chin. His hands, laid calmly on his knees, were workmanlike, unjeweled, strong — incapable of treachery; the voice, well modulated, courteous but carrying a note of irony and incredulity.

A little too much bluntness and Cato would construe it as a challenge; the merest hint of subtlety and he would close his mind. Too much politeness would stir suspicion; rudeness he would take as an affront to Roman dignity. Exaggeration he would instantly discredit; under-statement he would construe

literally. He was difficult. Tros would have preferred a man more vulnerable to emotion.

"I am from Britain," Tros remarked at last. "This is a prince of Britain." He nodded to Orwic, who saluted with aristocratic dignity.

"You have come in very gaudy litters," Cato answered. "Whose are they?"

"Helene's. Lacking other means of —"

"Can't you walk?" asked Cato. "I am prætor. I invariably walk."

"I can walk when I will," Tros answered. "Having no lictors to make me a way through the crowd I did well to borrow litters that the crowd would let pass. It is of no importance how I came. I will speak of Cæsar."

"You carry tales against him? I have heard them all," said Cato.

He closed his mouth tight, as a man does when he reins impatient horses.

"I come to prevent Cæsar from invading Britain," Tros insisted, leaning forward to watch Cato's eyes. "If he succeeds against the Britons, what will be his next move? Rome."

Cato nodded. "Cæsar," he said, "is the first sober man who has designed to make himself the master of Rome. Sulla was a drunkard. So was Marius. Cæsar drinks deep of the hog-swill of flattery. He is drunk with ambition. But that does not give you the right to conspire against the Republic."

"I will help you against Cæsar!" Tros said, rising, and began to pace the floor, as always when he felt excitement surging in his veins. Three times he strode the room's full length and back again, his hands behind him, and then stood, looking into Cato's face.

"Alien," said Cato. "I am prætor. Cæsar is a Roman general."

Tros snorted.

"You split hairs of morality while Cæsar cuts throats! Listen! You love Rome, and you hate Cæsar. Not I. I haven't Rome to lose nor all the plunder of

a hundred provinces to make me fearful. You set the welfare of the state above your own. I set the welfare of my friends above my own; and I love Britain, where a king lives whom I helped to resist Cæsar when he made his first raid on the island."

"Island?" said Cato. "We are told it is a mainland greater than all Gaul and Hispania."

"Mainland!" Tros snorted again. "A small, misty, wooded island, whose inhabitants can neither harm Rome nor enrich her treasury! A mere island, whose inhabitants are brave men. Cæsar, while he gains time, seeks to build a reputation. But I have heard how Cato, staunchest of all Romans, resolutely sets his face against wars when there is no excuse for war. They say there is no other public man who has dared to defy the Triumvirate. Therefore, I have made my way to Cato, at my own great risk."

"And the price?" asked Cato, looking sourly at him.

Tros exploded like a grampus coming up for air, then turned and paced the floor again.

"Cato!" he said, turning to him suddenly. "They packed you off to Cyprus to get rid of you, and all the world knows what happened. You found an island ruined by the money-lenders, and you left it in a fair way to recovery. I have heard how you flung the taunt in Pompey's face that, notwithstanding you dealt honestly, you brought more money back from Cyprus for the Roman treasury than Pompey brought from all his plundering of Asia. So you know what Roman rule means in the conquered provinces. I tell you, I have seen Gaul writhing under Cæsar's heel. Where I have known fair cities, there is wasted land and broken walls. I know a place where there are thirty thousand men who lack a right hand, simply because Cæsar is ambitious. I have seen the gangs of slaves go trailing out of Gaul to replace Romans on the farms of Italy and force your free men to enlist



in Cæsar's and Crassus' legions. And you ask my price?"

Cato eyed him undisturbed, his hands palms downward on his knees. No gesture, not a fleeting trace of an expression betrayed what thought was passing through his mind.

"Give me the right to call myself Cato's friend!" Tros urged, lowering his voice dramatically. "If I thought Rome held a hundred Catos, I would —"

Cato interrupted.

"Your opinion of me is unimportant. I am the prætor. That woman, Helene, whose litters you use, is a prostitute. You flaunt her impudence in Rome's face."

"Prostitute?" Tros retorted. "All Rome is given to prostitution! What does one more matter? I am told you wish to prosecute Rabirius for his chicanery in Egypt. Leave Helene to me and I will strip Rabirius as naked as when he yelled himself into the world! I will prove to you Cæsar supported him, prompted him, pocketed a fat percentage of the money he stole and now makes use of Helene to watch Rabirius — and you — and others. She is one of Cæsar's ablest spies. Touch her, and you bring down Cæsar on your head! Leave her to me, and I will hamstring Cæsar! Give me ten days, and you shall know about the war that Cæsar plans!"

Cato took a tablet from the table and wrote swiftly. Then he laid the tablet back, face downward on the table.

"Cæsar has authority," he said, "to declare war or make peace in Gaul."

"Britain is not Gaul," Tros answered. "Neither is Rome Gaul."

Cato rapped the table with his knuckles. The secretary entered, took the tablet and went out again.

"Cæsar has reported to the senate," said Cato, "that the Britons are constantly helping the Gauls to rebel."

"In the name of all the gods, why not?" Tros

thundered at him. "Should a brother not defend his brother? There are Gauls and Britons who belong to the same tribe, share the same king and till land on both sides of one narrow sea. And did your ancestor sit idle when Hannibal invaded Italy, because forsooth, he had not yet reached Rome? Do you, another Cato, wish to grovel before Cæsar? He will use the strength of Gaul and Britain against Rome, when he has glutted his ambition in the corner of the world. He is a madman! Stir up Gaul behind him! Let Gauls and Britons learn that there are men in Rome who sympathize. Give them but that much encouragement," — he snapped his fingers — "and Cæsar shall have his hands full!"

Cato, spreading out his knees with both hands resting on them, leaned back; he had done with arguing.

"No Roman prætor can lend his influence to the defeat of Roman arms," he said. "But I will do what can be done to bring the senate to a proper view of these things —"

"*Phaugh!*" Tros's fist went like a thunder-clap into his palm. "And two-thirds of the senators accepting Cæsar's bribes! The other third opposing him because they think Pompey might pay more money into their pockets! Cato, do you set this wolf-brood's appetite above fair dealing? Are you —"

"I am a Roman," said Cato.

"You shall see Rome fawning at Cæsar's feet!" Tros answered, his eyes glowing like a lion's.

The line of Cato's lips grew tighter and then flickered in a hard smile.

"And by whose authority do you come here, riding in prostitutes' litters to hurl threats at me?" he asked. "Are you a Roman citizen?"

"I come by Cæsar's leave," Tros answered, pulling out a parchment from his breast. He flourished it indignantly. He showed the seal and signature. "I won it! Three times I have had the best of Cæsar and—"

He checked himself, aware that he had lost his self-control, whereas the Roman had not.

"Well — and what?" asked Cato.

But the thought that had flashed across Tros's mind was nothing he could safely tell to any one of Cato's unimaginative temper; even in the heat of indignation he knew better than to run that risk.

"And I will save Britain from him," he said lamely. Then, recovering his self-possession, "You go prattle to the senate — if you can make them listen without paying them to sit still!"

He saluted in the Roman fashion and Cato stood up to return the salute with an air of being glad the interview was over. He ignored Orwic — merely nodded to him, as he might have done to a familiar slave, and Orwic flushed, not being used to rudeness even from his equals. As they left the room the Briton growled in Tros's ear —

"Is that truly one of Rome's great men?"

"Rome's greatest! Iron-headed, and as blind as a boulder resisting the sea! Born out of his time! He loves the Rome that died before the days of Marius and he is mad enough to think Cæsar can be tamed by quoting law! I have a thought, though."

For a minute Tros stood gazing at the Forum and its groups of politicians vehemently gesturing. Helene's eunuch bowed. He waved the man away.

"I will walk. Here —" He tossed him money. "Tell your mistress to expect me." Then, as he took Orwic's arm and they descended the steps together, "I have a thought that quarrels with inclination. I must study it. Keep silence."

Side by side they walked along the Via Sacra between rows of graceless statues, Orwic copying the stride that gave the Romans dignity when dignity of motive was the last thing in their minds. Tros strode like Hercules, observing nothing, with a frown above his eyes like brooding thunder.

"Of what do you think?" Orwic asked him at last, when they had bumped into so many people that apology had grown monotonous.

"Of my father's prophecy," Tros answered. "With his dying breath he foretold I should struggle against Cæsar but that I should serve him in the end."

"Against Britain?" Orwic asked, startled, puzzled.

"Nay. He knew I will betray no friendships. But — why not against Rome? Do you and I care whether Rome licks Cæsar's feet? This Tiber-wolf bred Cæsar — let the cub's teeth make her suffer for it! If we offer Rome to Cæsar he may turn his fangs away from Britain!"

"If we offer to do it he can laugh," said Orwic. "How can two-and-thirty men give Rome away?"

"The gods give and the gods take," Tros retorted. "Men are agents of the gods."

"But who knows what the gods intend?"

Tros turned that over in his mind a minute, doubting nothing except whether words could possibly convey his meaning to a man whose language he had learned but recently.

"The gods — they know," he said at last. "Men guess. And he who guesses rightly there and then becomes the edged tool of the gods."

"But how guess?" Orwic wondered. "If we had a druid with us —"

"He could tell us no more than we see," Tros interrupted. "Let us see Rome. If the heart is rotten, let us foretell death or a physician. I believe the gods purge evil with its offspring, and it may be Rome is ripe for Cæsar, who will be a drench that will burn Rome's belly. He may fail. She may vomit him out. She may swallow and smother him. Murder —"

"But — but —"

Orwic stared at the crowd — three-fifths of them slaves from the ends of the earth — for the Romans were taking their ease in the midsummer heat. Even the half empty streets sent up a roar like the voice of a cauldron, and the baking heat suggested future on the forge. There was a thunder where the rubbish of demolished buildings tumbled down the wooden

chutes into the carts. The sun shone through a haze of dust and, as the wind whipped up a cloud of it, there came down a narrow street, like specters, nearly a hundred men all chained together, staggering under blocks of marble.

"Those are Jews," said Tros. "They are the fruit from Pompey's harvest in Jerusalem. Unless you and I act wisely we shall see Caswallon led in triumph, and the Britons building Cæsar's Rome under the whip."

He was talking merely to keep Orwic silent. He wanted to think. He stood frowning, staring at the most dignified building in old Rome — the temple of the goddess Vesta, with the residence of the Vestal Virgins close behind it and, beyond that, the official home of the Pontifex Maximus.

## Chapter XXIII

### JULIUS NEPOS

*I have used life wondering at marvels — aye, and looking for them. But I know no greater marvel than the virtue readily discernible in some men, whose calling is vile. Their vileness is beyond coping with; it would be wiser to swim in Leviathan's sea and try to couzen him, than to bargain with such men's vileness. For they know their vileness and they understand its channels; he who understands it not is a sheep to a wolf. But their virtue to them is precious, and they understand it not. Touch such men's virtue and uncomprehending they respond, as a blind ship responds to a touch of the helm though all the gales of Neptune buffet and her nature bids her drift before them.*

From The Log of Tros of Samothrace

Tros led on, ignoring the crowd; but even in polyglot Rome there were limits to the strangeness that could



pass without exciting notice. If they had been slaves no citizen would have lowered himself by paying them attention, but they took the middle of the way like noblemen, although no servants followed to protect them from assault or from the importunities of wounded veterans.

So they were followed by small boys, who mimicked Tros's herculean swagger and made moustaches for themselves of street dirt out of compliment to Orwic. Traders tried to drag them into shops where Crassus' oriental plunder was beginning to seek sale. They were bellowed at by leather-lunged slaves who stood on stone blocks advertising brothels. Insolent gangs of gladiators in the pay of men grown newly rich called to them out of wine-shops, where maimed ex-soldiers clamored for the dregs of each man's drink. They were pestered by touts from lawless gambling-dens, thieves' auctions and even by slaves who were trying to sell themselves.

It was hours before Zeuxis found them, still wandering about Rome, visiting the temples and the great wooden arenas where the gladiators practised, under the eyes of gamblers studying their chances and the betting odds. Zeuxis arrived on foot, sweat running from him, breathless and so agitated he could hardly speak. His slaves supported him, wiping his face with handkerchiefs until he thrust them aside at last and, stepping between Tros and Orwic, seized Tros's arm.

"What have you done? What have you done? One day in Rome and this already! They have seized Helene! She was taken by the prætor's men! They wrapped her in a hood for fear the crowd might recognize her. One of her slaves followed and declares he saw her hustled into the prætor's prison. There is a guard put on her house and men are searching it! A few of her slaves have run, but most of them are lined up in the garden, telling all they know. It was by the merest luck the prætor's men did not find me in the house — I had just left. One of the slaves escaped and overtook me. I have

found you by describing you to people in the street and — gods of Hellas! — what a wanderer you are! I have followed you all over Rome.”

Tros tried to calm him, but the Greek appeared to have no nerve left. He said he did not even dare to return home until he knew the prætor’s men were not invading his house. He had sent a slave to see.

“They have no right to interfere with me — I am a Roman citizen, but a man’s rights — Tros, Tros, you have brought me ill luck!”

“Where shall we go?” Tros asked. A crowd was gathering. “If they should find my Northmen at your house —”

“That’s it, that’s it!” exclaimed Zeuxis, wringing his hands. “Your wretched, bearded, battle-axing, drunken, quarrelsome barbarians! The prætor will accuse me — here, this way!”

Slapping a slave’s wrist, who tried to calm him with affectionate remonstrances, he slipped through the crowd and led, panic-stricken, down a dozen evil-smelling lanes where the rubbish from tenements was dumped and mangy dogs snarled at the passers-by, until at last an alley opened into a nearly circular space that had been repaved with rubble from an ancient wall. There was a well in the center, protected by masonry constructed from the fragments of crude statuary, and though the buildings around the inclosure were tidy enough and there were no heaps of stinking garbage, they were mean, small, solidly and crudely built, with heavy, tall flat stones instead of arches over all the doors. It was a section of the oldest part of Rome.

Zeuxis struck at a door whose cypress planks were scarred by a hundred years of violence. He struck repeatedly, but faces peered through many a narrow window before the door was opened cautiously and a man thrust out his head. He had iron-gray whiskers that met underneath his chin. Chin and upper-lip were shaven. His nose was discolored by crisscross purple veins. Extremely bright eyes glittered from

under shaggy brows and his gray head, bald in the middle, was like a tangled mop.

"Zeuxis?" he said. "Volatile, venomous, vicious, effeminate — enter! You would never come here unless you were in trouble! Come in and amuse me. I suppose you have offended Cato. I know Cato better than to try to coax him, but you may as well tell me the news — the news — the news."

His voice echoed under the vaulted ceiling of a passage lighted dimly by one candle stuck on an iron bracket. On the walls of the passage were weapons, shields, helmets; some seemed to have come from ends of the earth; there were Parthian scimitars, studded with iron, three-headed spears and wave-edged daggers, long-handled gooks for dragging down a horseman, nets, tridents and swords by the dozen, of every imaginable shape and length.

Fire glowed on a hearth in a room at the end of the passage. There was something cooking on the coals and acrid smoke, that made the eyes smart, clouded among beams from which hung odds and ends of recently washed clothing. On the walls of the room hung garments of extraordinary richness, gruesomely suggestive of the spoils of horrible victories — more weapons — and a brazier in the corner, with an iron of peculiar shape beside it. Over the hearth, where smoky images of wax stood on a shelf in gloom, was an extremely heavy, short, broad-bladed sword. There were benches and a table, but the furniture was meager, unpainted and such as the poorest citizen of Rome might have possessed.

"I introduce you to Julius Nepos," said Zeuxis, seeming to recover self-possession when the old man slammed the door and bolted it. The only light came from the smoky hearth and from a window, high up in the wall, which seemed to open on a courtyard. The heat was so great that the candles set on brackets on the walls had drooped in drunken curves and there was tallow on the flag-stone floor beneath them.

Tros bowed and Orwic copied him, but both men felt an impulse of reserve. Old Nepos noticed it.

"Be seated," he said gruffly. "I have cut the heads off nobler men than you. I have slain kings."

He seemed to think that made him anybody's equal. He glanced at the garments that hung on the walls — his perquisites; and having laid claim to distinction, he grew genial and grinned — pulled off his sandals and shirt, revealing a torso and arms like Vulcan's, all lumpy with muscle, the color of bronze, and sat down on a creaking bench.

"This is the man," said Zeuxis, "who refused to be Sulla's headsman and yet Sulla spared him. He was formerly the chief instructor of the public gladiators, and not even Sulla dared to —"

"Oh yes, he did," Nepos interrupted. "He deprived me of my privileges. I might have starved; only when Cato became prætor he ordered Sulla's informers rounded up; and then he sent for me and had me cut the heads off most of them — a miserable brood! — nine-and-thirty in one afternoon, and a pleasanter death than they earned! If Cato had listened to me they would have died in the arena, fighting one another, with the beasts to clean up the survivors; but Cato thought they were too cowardly, although I told him a hot iron will make anybody fight. So I beheaded them. I killed two hundred and eleven altogether, and good riddance!"

His face looked something like a satyr's as he leaned forward to observe Tros. There were no signs of ferocity about him — rather of philosophic humor, slightly cynical but tolerant. He struck the table with his fist and called for wine, which was brought in by a woman less agreeable to look at than himself. She had thick lips and most of her teeth were missing; her figure was shapeless, her arms like a fighting man's and her greasy hair like Medusa's. But it was good wine; and she provided lumps of bread to eat with it, breaking them off from the loaf with fingers that looked capable of tearing throats.

"And so now you are in trouble," remarked Nepos, eyeing Zeuxis comically. "You believe because I am

a friend of Cato I can get you out of it. Isn't that so? Well, I tell you Cato doesn't like you, Zeuxis. Has he caught you cheating the public treasury over some contract for a spectacle?"

"He has arrested Helene," said Zeuxis.

Nepos suddenly sat upright, swallowed wine and snapped his mouth shut.

"So it is Cato who is in trouble, is it?" he said. "Obstinate old tamperer with hot irons! Fool! She'll wreck him! The mob loves her. What will he do — have her thrown to the beasts? Old imbecile! They'll leave the benches and throw Cato in in place of her! There are some things Cato can't do, prætor though he is."

"How teach him?" wondered Zeuxis.

"Oh, he's teachable," said Nepos. "You couldn't have taught Sulla anything, or Marius — and Pompey won't learn nowadays, since flattery went to his head. But you can teach Cato what the crowd will have and what it won't have. Cato believes in the voice of the people. He'll hear it! As I've told him often, all they care for is money, doles of corn and entertainment. Cato sat there, on that bench, last night. He likes me because I talk good sense and never flatter him.

"I like Cæsar, who knows how to rule; but I told Cato now is the time to throw in his lot with Pompey, and increase corn-doles and give astonishing spectacles, if he hopes to stand in Cæsar's way. But Cato hates Pompey nearly as much as he does Cæsar so that's mutual. Pompey detests him for going barefooted and poking his nose into public accounts. So he has bagged Helene, has he? Well, we'll have to save him from that predicament! You can't tell me Helene isn't Cæsar's woman. Cæsar can't afford to let his spies become disorganized. He'll kill Cato! He hates him. He'd love an opportunity to turn on him. Cato is a fool. I love him better than a brother, but he's a



fool—he's a fool—he's an old fool—and that's worse than a young one!"

Zeuxis shrugged his shoulders.

"He is honest, which is much the same thing!"

"No, he isn't," said Nepos. "He is proud and obstinate. There's no such thing as honesty."

There came a hammering at the outer door and Nepos' wife admitted one of Zeuxis' slaves, who delivered his news breathlessly:

"The prætor's men have not come near the house. But the freedman Conops went to Ostia, so now there is none who can control the lord Tros's barbarians, who are afraid because of their master's absence and are threatening to go and look for him."

Instantly Julius Nepos seemed to throw off twenty years. His muscles tautened. Even his voice grew younger:

"Barbarians? What sort?" he asked. He glanced shrewdly at Orwic, who resented the appraisal and frowned haughtily. Tros sat still, acutely conscious of a tingling in his spine. It was Zeuxis who answered:

"Northmen—whatever that is. They are a breed never before seen in Rome, having red beards; and they fight with axes. But some are Britons and resemble Gauls. That one"—he pointed at Orwic—"is a prince among the Britons."

"Are they free men?" Nepos asked.

Instantly Tros lied to save them. If he had answered they were free men, nothing would have been more simple than to bring some charge against them. Then, as aliens unrepresented by an influential advocate, they might be condemned and sentenced to the arena.

"Slaves," he remarked, compelling his voice to sound casual. But his fist was clenched and Nepos noticed it.

"I have seen too many die, not to know when a man is afraid, friend Tros," he said, a lean smile on his face. "Good gladiators bring a high price. Men who fight with axes would be something new. They might be matched against the Mauritians. Pompey

would buy them. It would be a short way into Pompey's favor. That way we could approach Pompey, who is difficult to reach. We might persuade him; he would again put Cæsar under obligation."

Zeuxis chuckled. His superficial subtlety was stirred by Nepos' argument; he saw all sides of it, if not the inside.

"Dionysus! Excellent! Nothing ever was more accurate! Julius Nepos, you are fit to govern Rome, you understand Pompey and Cæsar so well! Tros, have you not understood him? Pompey and Cæsar lavish favors on each other, while they watch each other like cat and dog. Each hopes to be able to accuse the other of ingratitude when the time comes that they quarrel openly at last. Pompey will compel Cato to set Helene free, and he will tell all Rome he did it to oblige Cæsar. He likes nothing better than to get Cato into difficulties with the Roman mob, because he knows that if it weren't for Cato's blunders and lack of tact the old man might be dangerous. Pompey will jump at it! Sell him your Northmen, Tros!"

Zeuxis leaned back and enjoyed the alarm that Tros could not conceal. He knew the Northmen were not slaves. He knew Nepos—understood the old man's combination of ferocity and amiable instinct.

But Tros's subtlety could under-dig the Greek's. He was at bay. He had his men to save, which stirred his wits. And he was not afraid Zeuxis would utterly betray him so long as there were pearls to be obtained by other means than downright treachery.

"The notion is good," he said, rising. "I will visit Pompey. Where is he?"

"As I told you, his wife is ill. You will have to drive out to his country villa, where senators wait at the gate like slaves for the chance of a word with him."

"No," said Nepos. "Pompey comes to Rome to-night. How do I know? Never mind. There are those who must go to Pompey and beg favors; but there are others whom not even Pompey the Great dares re-

fuse if they send for him, no matter at what hour."

"The Vestal Virgins," Zeuxis said, and shuddered. "May the gods protect us from entanglements with them! This mob, that worships venery, adores those virgins and will kill you if they frown. But what should Pompey have to do with them?"

"Doubtless he brings gifts. Possibly he begs a favor for his wife," said Nepos; but he did not look as if he thought that was the reason. He was sly eyed.

"Where will he lodge?" Tros asked him.

"In his own house. Look you now—men have made worse friends than myself, and I love Cato, who is much too obstinate a man to be persuaded. We must get that Helene out of Cato's hands, if we want to keep Cato from being mobbed. Once or twice already they have nearly killed him because he did something stupid—once it was closing the brothels and once it was stopping payment of illegal bills on the treasury. So if you want my friendship, go you to Pompey and ask him to overrule Cato. You will either have to flatter him or buy him. Better both! For twenty gladiators of a new breed he would give you almost anything you ask. Cato will yield; he will have to. That will save his skin, which is what I want, and it may also force him into Pompey's camp, which would be good politics. But never mind politics. Get Helene released and you'll find my friendship worth more to you than Pompey's or any other man's in Rome."

Tros had made up his mind. Orwic, who had learned to recognize the symptoms, strode to the door and opened it. Tros, with a jerk of his head, beckoned Zeuxis. The Greek, too, recognized finality.

"Zeus sneezes and the earth quakes!" he remarked, then took his leave of Nepos, winking and making suggestive movements with his hand when he was sure Tros could not see what he was doing. Nepos' face as he answered Tros's salute was an enigma.

It was dark when they emerged out of the maze of lanes into a street. Torches were already breaking up the gloom where gallants swaggered to some rendezvous amid a swarm of their retainers. The city's voice had altered from the day din to the night roar; it suggested carnival, although there was no merry-making in the streets; whoever had no bodyguard slunk swiftly through the shadows. Bellowing voices on the stone blocks under yellow lamps announced attractions within walls; the miserable eating-houses and the wine-shops did a thronging trade; but the streets were a danger zone, dagger-infested, along which the prosperous strode in the midst of armed slaves and whoever else ventured went swiftly from shelter to shelter. Dawn never broke but saw the slaves of the *municipium* pick up dead bodies in the street.

"To your house," Tros commanded, as if giving orders from his own poop, and Zeuxis led the way, his five slaves, fussily important, doing their utmost to make the party look too dangerous to interfere with.

But Zeuxis was in no mood to dispute the right of way with any Roman gallant and his gladiators. At the sight of any group of men approaching he turned instantly down side-streets. He preferred to risk a scuffle with the unattached ruffians who made a living by taking one side or the other in the riots that the politicians staged whenever a court decision or a ruling of the senate upset calculations. Such men seldom attacked any one unless paid to do it. Gladiators who attended gallants on their way to dissolute amusement flattered their owners' vanity by bullying any group they met less numerous or pugnacious than their own.

So they were a long time reaching the bridge that crossed the Tiber, and had splashed into many a pool of filth besides unconsciously assuming the rather furtive air that strategy of that sort imposes on pedestrians. The five slaves altogether lost their

arrogance. In the glare of the lanterns at the guard-house at the bridgefoot, where the stinking empty fish-boxes were piled and the boatmen slept like corpses on the long ramp leading to the quay, they made no deep impression on the guards of the *municipium*.

“Halt there! Stand aside and wait!”

A gruff ex-legionary, leaning on a spear and leering with the easy insolence acquired in six campaigns, made a gesture that brought six more spearmen into line behind him, barring the narrow approach to the bridge. Over beyond the river there was torchlight. There came a trumpet call. It was answered by shouts from guards stationed at intervals along the parapet in impenetrable darkness. Lights on the bridge were forbidden.

Then another trumpet call. Presently a stream of torchlight flowed on to the bridge, its glare reflected in the water. Fire laws, or any other laws, are subtly honored when the famous disobey them.

“Who comes? Pompey!” said the spearman, grinning into Tros’s face. “Better get out of the way, my friend!”

His insolence was tempered by familiarity. He seemed to recognize in Tros an old campaigner like himself. Though Tros stood still, he made no effort to enforce the order, merely moving his head side-wise, curiously, to observe him with a better slant of light. The wooden bridge began to thunder to the tramp of men all breaking step.

“Let us stand back in the shadow!” Zeuxis whispered and set the example, followed by his slaves, but Tros remained facing the spearman and Orwic, arms folded, stood with him.

“Are you one of Pompey’s veterans by any chance?” the spearman asked. “Take my advice, friend. This is a poor place and a poor time to approach him.”

“He expects me,” Tros answered and the spearman stared at him with new appreciation.



"You are either over-bold or more important than you look with that small following," he said. "We will see. We will see. I have seen strange happenings in my day."

Tros turned to Orwic and spoke quietly in Gaulish:

"When the lictors order us to stand aside, keep place abreast of me."

A horse's head—a phantom in the torchlight—tossed above the lictors' fasces. Dimly, behind them, more horses appeared, and streams of men on foot, like shadows, with the torchlight shining here and there on armor or an ornament but there was silence except the groaning of the bridge's timbers and the echoing tramp of feet. There was a sense of mystery—or portent.

Suddenly the man in front of Tros threw up his spear and swung the men behind him into line, facing the roadway. They stood rigidly, like statues, as the lictors, two lines of four in single file, advanced with all the dignity attainable by human symbols of authority in motion. Stately, measured, neither slow nor fast but like the passing of the hours into eternity, they strode toward Tros, and he was no such fool as to attempt to let the two files pass on either hand. Though Rome was rotten at the core, that very fact increased insistence on respect for the tokens of her magistracy. To have dared to stand ground would have meant, more likely than an interview with Pompey, a cudgeling and then a ducking in the Tiber. He shouted before they reached him.

"Pompeius Magnus, hail!"

His voice was like a captain's on his poop—re-sounding, sudden, vibrant with assurance. There was something of a gong note in it.

"I am Tros of Samothrace!"

"Halt!" said a bored voice and a dozen men repeated the command. There was a rush of footmen to surround the leader's horse, then silence so tense that the swirling of the river past the bridge-piles struck on the ear like music.

Torches moved, swaying confusedly. Pompey, his cloak thrown back so that torchlight gleamed on the gold inlay of his breastplate, leaned forward on his horse, shielding his eyes with his right hand.

"Who did the man say he is?"

"I am Tros of Samothrace."

"I believe I remember him. Let him approach."

Two lictors lined up, one on either side of Tros; two more opposed themselves to Orwic and prevented him from following. Tros was marched to about half a spear's length from Pompey's stirrup, where the lictors signed to him to stand still and a dozen faces peered at him.

"Is this an omen, Tros?" asked Pompey in a pleasant, cultured voice suggestive of half humorous contempt for his surroundings. "I remember you. I gave your father leave to use all Roman ports. I trust he has not misused that privilege."

"He is dead," said Tros. "I have word for your private ear."

"All Rome has that!" said Pompey. "I am pestered with communications. However, I will hear you. What is it?"

"Secret as well as urgent. Name place and hour and let me speak with you alone. I seek nothing for myself."

"Rare individual! *Comites*,"\* said Pompey, laughing in the patronizing way of men who have been flattered until all comment becomes condescension, "here is a man who has sufficient. He asks nothing! Envy him! So many of us have too much!"

He stared at Tros, signing to some of the slaves to move the torches so that he could better read his face. His own was pouched under the eyes but rather handsome in a florid, heavy, thick-set way. His eyes glittered. The lips curled proudly, and he sat his horse easily, gracefully, with rather portly dignity. He looked as if success had softened him

\* Comrades.

without his being aware of it, but there were no signs of debauch.

"You may follow," he said, "and I will hear you when I have time."

But Tros had cooled his heels once too often in the anterooms of Alexandria, where Ptolemy's eunuchs pocketed the fees of applicants, kept them waiting and dismissed them without audience, to be pigeon-holed as easily as that. His sureness that the gods were all around him made him no cringing suppliant.

"You may listen or not, as you please, Pompeius Magnus. I have crossed two seas to speak with you. Name me an hour and a place, or I will find another who will listen."

Pompey legged his horse to hide astonishment. In all Rome there was only Cato who had dared to affront him since Crassus went away. A handsome youngster strode into the torchlight and stood swaggering in front of Tros.

"Do you know to whom you speak?" he demanded.

"Please, Flavius! Stand aside!" said Pompey, reining his horse toward Tros again. "This may prove interesting. Tros, do you know where the temple of Vesta stands? Approach me there, after the morning ceremony. Forward!"

The two lictors hustled Tros aside. The bridge began to tremble as the march resumed and Pompey passed on into darkness, torchlight gleaming on the shield and helmet carried for him by a slave in close attendance.

"You are mad!" remarked Zeuxis, striding gallantly enough out of the shadow when the last of the long cortege had streamed by and a roar in the narrow city streets announced that Pompey, recognized already, was receiving an ovation. "If you go

to the temple of Vesta Pompey will offer you employment, for the sake of obtaining your Northmen and Britons, about whom Nepos certainly will tell him before midnight. And if you refuse, he will seize your men for the arena. He will throw you into prison if you make the least fuss; he will simply say you are the enemy of Rome. You are as mad as Cato himself! You should have won his favor while you had the opportunity."

"You will do well if you earn mine!" Tros retorted, visibly annoyed. "Lead on."

Zeuxis fell into stride beside him but there was no more talk until they came to Zeuxis' house. Relationship of host and guest was obviously superficial now. Neither man trusted the other. Even Orwic, who could understand no word of Greek or Latin, realized that Zeuxis' house had turned into a place of danger rather than a refuge.

## Chapter XXIV

### VIRGO VESTALIS MAXIMA

*How I wonder at the credulous who think their impudence endows them with all knowledge! So vast is their credulity that if they hear of something that they understand not, they declare it is not. Such is their credulity that they believe their senses. But they disbelieve in spirit, though they see death all around them and not even their ignorance pretends to know what breathed the life into that which dies when the breath is withdrawn.*

From The Log of Tros of Samothrace

Tros wished now he had come to Rome without his men — even without Orwic. He would have been safer without them. He could easily have hired two dozen Romans to act as bodyguard; he might even have bought gladiators; there were second-hand ones,

maimed, that could be bought cheap. But all those possibilities had occurred to him before he left his ship, outside Tarentum Harbor, and his real reason for bringing both Northmen and Britons remained as important as ever; they were hostages.

However much he trusted Sigurdson, he knew he could better trust him not to sail away and turn to piracy so long as eight of his nearest relatives and a dozen other countrymen were ashore and counting on him to keep tryst. The Britons on the ship were not particularly loyal to Orwic; they might not hesitate to leave him languishing on foreign soil; but the Northmen were as loyal to one another as even Tros himself could be to any man who served him honestly.

But that consideration made it all the more essential to save the men he had with him. If they should lose their lives in a fair fight, that might strengthen the bond between him and their relatives on board the ship, it being Northman aspiration to die fighting; but to lose them like a dunder-headed yokel choused out of his wares would be an insult and a breach of trust for which no Northman would forgive him any more than he, Tros, could forgive himself.

He could see through Zeuxis' subtlety. He suspected the Greek had all along known that the prætor's men were nowhere near his house. Zeuxis might have staged that panic in order to introduce Nepos, who, he probably felt sure, would try to get Tros's Northmen for the school of gladiators. Should Tros's men be seized on some pretext, it would be a typical Greek trick to ask for pearls with which to purchase their release. And no bag of pearls would be deep enough. He saw through Zeuxis.

That being so, he surprised him. He preferred, if destiny intended he should lose his men, to do the thing himself, and blame himself, rather than enrich a treacherous acquaintance — and the more so when suspicion was corroborated by the Northmen after he reached Zeuxis' house.

He went straight to the Northmen's quarters. They



were lodged in a barn between the cow-byre and the long, low, crowded sheds in which the Greek's slaves lived. When he aroused them from sleep they reported there had been no difficulties such as Zeuxis' slave had spoken of. They had not feared for Tros. They hardly knew he was away. Some slave-women who knew Gaulish had made love to them and tried to persuade them to get drunk. But they had kept their promise and behaved themselves, suspecting trickery. Besides, they had not known when Tros might need their services, so they had slept whenever visitors would let them. Between times they had mended footgear, persuading the Britons to do the same thing, to keep the Britons out of mischief.

There was nothing to be done with the weapons or baggage but to leave them all in Zeuxis' charge. Tros did not dare to enter Rome with armed men at his back. Not even Pompey would have let his followers wear more than daggers openly, when they were once inside the city walls, unless the senate should expressly grant permission – not that Pompey cared a copper *as*\* for what the senate thought, but to have done so would have been tantamount to a declaration that he had assumed the sole dictatorship – which would have brought Cæsar hurrying to wrest it from him.

So Tros told the Northmen to hide daggers in their tunics and make bundles of their other weapons to be left wherever Zeuxis cared to stow them. He disarmed the Britons altogether, since he could not depend on them to keep their heads in an emergency. Then, telling each man to equip himself with a flask and haversack, he bribed Zeuxis' steward heavily to serve out rations for a day or two. Experience had taught him that the Northmen's zeal depended on their stomachs much more than was the case with men from southern lands. Well fed, he would have dared to lead them against twice their tale of Roman

\*The smallest coin in circulation.

legionaries; hungry, they would run away from ghosts.

Then he went to his room and dressed himself in his gorgeous oriental cloak and Grecian tunic, presently joining Zeuxis at the supper-table, where they were waited on by girls — descendants of the decadents who ruined Greece. It was the steward, whispering, who broke the news to Zeuxis that Tros's men were ready for a night-march.

"You desert me?" Zeuxis asked, with viperish resentment in his voice. But he was not so startled that he did not gesture to a slave-girl to pay Tros more intimate attention. "Surely you will sleep here? You can leave at dawn and be at the shrine of Vesta before Pompey reaches it."

"If I should wait, I would have more to beg of Pompey than I care to crave from any man," Tros answered. "Guard my baggage, Zeuxis, and remember — I have promised you nine pearls on a condition. If I fail, or if you fail me, though I had to throw a thousand pearls into the Tiber I would take care you should get none! I perceive your friendship is a purchasable merchandise. I bid high, and I paid you half down when we struck the bargain."

Zeuxis' lustrously immoral eyes were looking at Tros's cloak. As plainly as if speech had said it, he was wondering where so great a weight of pearls was hidden. The lust that jewels have the power to arouse in some men, and some women, burned behind the Greek's eyes. The smile that stole over his face was like a mask deliberately chosen — thoughtfully adjusted — changed a time or two until he thought it fitted.

"Drink, noble guest!" he said, and signed to a Syrian slave to fill the cups. "This night has gone to both our heads. We talk like madmen rather than two sons of Hellas. Samothrace is stepson to Eleusis — drink! I pledge you brotherhood. May wise Athene's owls bear midnight wisdom to you. Drink!"

But Tros set down the silver cup untasted. Though he doubted that his host would poison him, he knew

the Syrian slaves' infernal skill and read the greed in Zeuxis' eyes.

"Pallas Athene, judge then! I will drink with you again, friend Zeuxis, when I have accomplished my purpose. Though the goddess deserted Hellas, may her wisdom govern us! And now your drooping eyelids welcome sleep, so I will act the good guest and not stand in Morpheus' way. Sleep soundly, and may all Olympus bless you for your hospitality."

He took his leave magnificently, as if Zuexis were a king, bestowing largess on the servants and avoiding any conversation that could give the Greek a hint of his intentions. He refused the offer of a guide; such a man would merely be a spy for Zeuxis. He laughed as he strode toward Rome at the head of his men, for a slave went by on horseback, full pelt; and although he did not recognize the man, he was as sure as that the moon was rising on his right hand, that the Greek had sent a messenger to Pompey, or else Nepos, which amounted to the same thing. Pompey would learn of the pearls before dawn or, if not Pompey, one of Pompey's personal lieutenants, which might be even more dangerous.

He had one advantage. Wind and sea observe no hour-glass; he who has stood watch, and reefed, and gone aloft in midnight gales has lost the greater part of that inertia that dulls the wits of superstitious men in darkness. Tros could take advantage of the night and steal a march on treachery; and he thought he could count on his men to obey him though the shadows seemed to hint at unseen horror — though the Via Appia was lined with tombs and gloomy cypresses all haunted by the specters of the dead, and wind sighed through the trees like ghost-worlds whispering.

"I am afraid," said Orwic, striding beside Tros. "We Britons have an extra sense that warns us of things we can't see. My grandmother had the gift remarkably, and I inherit it. I wish I had a sword. This dagger isn't much use."

"Play the prince!" Tros answered gruffly. "Any fool can be afraid at night."

Himself, he had only one dread, one pertinent regret. He feared for Conops, who could hide himself in Ostia and watch for the arrival of the ship without the least risk of detection, if only Zeuxis had not known about it. He gritted his teeth as he condemned himself for not having sent Conops straight to Ostia before he ever entered Zeuxis' house. More to encourage himself than for Orwic's benefit, he broke out in explosive sentences:

"A man can't think of everything. The gods must do their part. We should be gods, not men, if we could foresee all. It would be impudence to take the full responsibility for what will happen. Are the gods dead — dumb — ignorant? And shall a god not recognize emergency?"

"Suppose we pray," suggested Orwic.

"Like a lot of lousy beggars. Rot me any gods who listen to such whining! Shall the gods descend and smirch themselves amid our swinery, or shall we rise and breathe their wisdom?"

Orwic shuddered. Celt-like, it disturbed him to assume familiarity with unseen agencies. Drunk or sober, he could swear with any lover of swift action, taking half the names of Briton's gods in vain, but when it came to thinking of the gods as powers to be reckoned with he thrilled with reverence. He could, and he invariably did, scorn druids in the abstract. In the presence of a druid he was insolent to hide his feelings. And when — as Tros invariably did — he felt himself within the orbit of the gods he was more fearful of them than encouraged — whereas Tros regarded gods as friends, who laughed at men's absurdities, despised their cowardice and took delight only in bravery, honesty, willingness, zeal.

"I think I hear the gods," said Orwic; for the trees were whispering. An owl swooped by on noiseless wings. The shadows moved in moonlight. "What if the gods are warning us to turn back? What can thirty

of us do in Rome to hinder Cæsar? We have been having bad luck since the boat upset us in Tarentum Harbor. We were robbed in the inns on the road, and we were cheated by stage-contractors — eaten by the bedbugs — sickened by the bad food and the worse wine. Then Zeuxis' house, and treachery if ever I sensed it with every nerve of my skin! Cato — and what good did that do? He simply arrested that woman, which will turn her into our malignant enemy! Now we march into Rome without weapons, to see Pompey, who —”

Tros silenced him with an oath.

“Take all my men then! Go to Ostia! Wait there! I will do better alone, without such croaking in my ears!”

“No,” Orwic answered. “By the blood of Lud of Lunden, I will not desert you. You are a man, Tros. I would rather die with you than run away and live. But I am not confident, nevertheless. I think this is a desperate affair.”

“It is the gods' affair,” Tros answered. “Nothing that the gods approve is desperate.”

The Northmen, meanwhile, swung along the road with the determined step of well-fed venturers whose faith was in their leader. Two circumstances gave them confidence — that Tros was wearing his embroidered cloak implied that he anticipated welcome from important personages; and that they had left their weapons in Zeuxis' barn convinced them trouble was unlikely. They were thrilled by the thought of exploring Rome — the fabulous city of which they had heard tales by the winter firelight in their northern homes; and they began to sing a marching song, the Britons taking courage of example, humming the tune with them. And when men sing on the march their leader grows aware of spiritual thrills not easy to explain, but comforting. That singing did more to restore Orwic's nerve than all Tros's argument, and Tros grew silent because pride in his men smothered lesser emotions.

By the great stone gate, the Porta Capena, the guards



of the *municipium* stared sleepily, but they were no more than police. The city was defended on her frontiers — far-flung. Mistress of all Italy and half the world, Rome recognized no need to shut her gates; they stood wide, rusting on their hinges like the Gates of Janus at the Forum that were never closed unless the whole Republic was at peace, as had happened in no man's memory. Tros led in through the gate unchallenged and at that hour of night there were no parties of young gallants and their gladiators to dispute the right of way. Rare guards, patrolling two by two, raised lanterns as they passed, by way of a salute. More rarely, a belated pair of citizens, escorting each other homeward from a rich man's table, hurried down a side-street to avoid them. Now and then a voice cried from a roof or from an upper window in praise of Pompey; coming in the wake of the ovation Pompey had received, Tros benefited by it; men supposed he was bringing in the rear-guard of Pompey's followers. Notoriously Pompey never entered Rome with any show of military power; it was like him to divide his following and bring the last lot in at midnight. There were even some who caught sight of the gold embroidery on Tros's cloak as he passed a lantern flickering before a rich man's house and mistook him for Pompey himself; but, since it was to no man's profit to inquire too closely into Pompey's doings in the night, those flurries of excitement died as suddenly as they were born.

But in the Forum there were guards who dared not sleep, since they protected the jewelers and money-changers and the officers of bankers who bought and sold drafts on the ends of the earth. Nine-tenths of Rome's own business was done by draft, men trading in each other's debts until the interwoven maze of liabilities became too complicated to unravel and the slave was lucky who could say who rightly owned him. Where the round shrine of the Flame of Vesta stood — Rome's serenest building, in which the Vestal Virgins tended the undying fire and no unhallowed

eye beheld the seven symbols hidden there, on which Rome's destiny depended — there were lictors and a lictor's guard.

Another lictor and his guard stood over by the Atrium, where the Vestals lived in splendid dignity; and yet another lictor stood watch by the Regia, headquarters of the one man in the world who had authority to choose and to appoint, and even to condemn to living burial, if they should break their vow of chastity, the six most sacred personages whom Rome the more revered the more her own unchastity increased.

By daylight, when the Forum roared under a roasting sun, there was no understanding Rome's invincibility. But in the night below the frowning shadow of great Jupiter's Etruscan fane that loomed over the Capitol, when only lanterns and the lonely guards disturbed the solitude, and moonlight shone on rows of statues of the men who had drenched Rome in blood, or had defended her against Epirus, against Carthage, against Spartacus — of men who had returned from laying Rome's heel on the necks of Hispania and Greece and Asia — of stern men who had made her laws and stalwarts who had broken them but never dreamed of Rome as less than their triumphant mother — understanding swept over a man, and even Tros stood still in admiration, hating while he wondered.

Orwic stood spellbound. The Northmen gazed and hardly breathed. Awe stirred imagination and they thought they saw the images of gods who governed Rome. To them the stillness was alive with awful entities.

A bell rang — one note, silver and serene, in harmony with moonlight and the marble. Silently, as if a grave gave up its dead, the shrouded figure of a woman came out of the Vestals' palace. Instantly, as if he stepped out of another world, a lictor took his place in front of her and led toward the shrine of Vesta. Slaves, more dignified and gentle looking than free women, followed. Every guard within the Forum

precincts came to statuesque attention and Tros raised his right hand, bowing.

The procession passed and banished into shadow in the porch of Vesta's shrine. Tros signaled to his men to form up; silently they lined the route between the palace and the shrine, ten paces back from it. Tros growled in Orwic's ear:

"I told you the gods guided us! I did not know the hour of the Vestals changed the watch."

He stood alone in front of all his men, a fine, heroic figure with the leaner, lithier looking Briton half a pace behind him. On his right, in line with Orwic, the grim, bearded giant who served as deputy lieutenant of the Northmen, in place of Sigurdsen who had to bring the ship to Ostia, stood breathing like a grampus.

Then again, the one note on the silver bell. The lic-tor strode out of the shadow and the same procession wended its way back toward the palace, only that the Vestal Virgin this time was an older woman, statelier, who walked more heavily. Folds of her pallium, ample and studiedly hung, the arrangement of pallium over her head to resemble a hood, the repose of her shoulders and rhythm of movement united to make her resemble an image of womanly dignity conjured to life. Not the lic-tor himself, with his consciousness of centuries-old symbolism, more than echoed her expression of sublime, accepted and unquestionable honor. She was majesty itself—aloof, alone, so higher than the law that she looked neither to the right nor left, lest some one in the law's toils should be able to claim recognition and be set free. None, even on the way to execution, could behold a Vestal Virgin's face and be denied his liberty.

As she approached, Tros bent his right knee, raising his right hand, his head bowed. Orwic, uninstructed, copied him. The Northmen and the Britons knelt like shadows thrown by moonlight on the paving-stones, as Tros's voice broke the silence.

*"Virgo vestalis maxima!"*

Lover of all pageantry, and scornful of all life, that

was not drama, he omitted no vibration from his voice that might add to the scene's solemnity. It rang with reverence, but was a challenge, none the less. No less obsequious, more dignity-conceding summons to attention ever reached a Vestal Virgin's ears! It was the voice of strength adjuring strength — of purpose that evoked authority!

The Vestal faced him, pausing, and the lictor seemed in doubt exactly what to do; he lowered his fasces, the edge of the ax toward Tros, who made a gesture, raising both hands upward and then, standing upright, spoke exactly seven syllables in a language neither Orwic, nor the lictor, nor the Vestal's servants understood. But the Vestal drew aside the pallium that half-concealed her face—not speaking—pale and as severe as chastity, her middle-aged patrician features hard as marble in the moon's rays.

“In the Name I may not utter, audience!”

She nodded, saying something to the lictor, and passed on. The lictor signed to Tros to follow at a decent distance and three women, hooded like the three Fates, arm-in-arm, lingered a little to make certain of the interval, their glances over-shoulder not suggesting any invitation to draw nearer. Tros signed to his men to follow. Not a sanctuary in the sense that criminals might find a refuge there, the portico before the Vestal's palace was a place where waiting, unarmed men were hardly likely to be challenged.

At the palace door he was kept waiting so interminably that his men grew restless. Orwic whispered that another night was wasted. But the lictor came at last through a painted, carved door opening on silent hinges. The lictor beckoned. Orwic followed Tros.

They stepped on marble into a dim magnificence. An atrium adorned with columns and the statues of dead Vestals faded into gloom, so that the walls were hardly seen. Gold glinted on the cornices. There was a glimpse of marble stairs. Dark tapestries receded into shadow. There were two chairs, ebony and ivory, beneath a canopy between two pillars; and a rug was

spread before the chairs that Pompey looted from the bed-chamber of Mithridates' queen—a thing of gorgeous silences, in which the feet sank deep.

The lictor turned his back toward the door, his fasces raised. A bell, whose note was like the drip of water in a silver basin, rang once and a curtain moved. In dim light from the lanterns near the canopy two Vestals—she to whom Tros had spoken and another, twenty years her junior—each followed by her women, entered and the women rearranged the folds of their white pallia as they were seated.

“You may approach now,” said the lictor.

The chief Vestal murmured, hardly opening her lips: Slave-women moved into shadow. The surrounding gloom became alive with eyes and figures almost motionless but it was possible to speak low-voiced and be unheard by any but the Vestals. Tros and Orwic marched up to the carpet, bowed with their right hands raised, and stood erect, waiting until the chief of the Vestals spoke.

“Your name?” she asked.

Her tone implied authority that none had challenged. Equally, no pride obscured her calm intelligence; she looked like one at peace within herself, because she understood and was assured of peace whatever happened. There was candor in her eyes that might turn cruel, but no weakness and not too much mercy. She was the patrician, consciously above the law and none the less steel-fettered by a higher law of duty.

“I am Tros of Samothrace.”

“You have appealed in the unutterable Name. It is forbidden to seek favors for yourself in that Name. Nor am I initiated in the mysteries that you invoke, save in so far as I must recognize all branches of the Tree. For whom do you seek benevolence?”

Tros, taking Orwic's hand, presented him, the younger man not lacking dignity; his inborn aristocracy impelled him to behave as if the Vestal, of whose virtues he was ignorant, was not less than an



empress. He conveyed the unmistakable suggestion that respect paid by himself was something that the very gods might envy—and the Vestal smiled.

“Orwic, a prince of Britain,” Tros announced. “Regrettably he knows no Latin.”

In his heart he laughed to think that Orwic knew no Latin. He could plead the Britons’ cause more artfully than any Briton could, and run less risk of noosing his own neck.

“You seek benevolence for him? Is he accused of crime? Is he a fugitive from justice?”

The Vestal’s voice was tinged with iron now. She held her power to set aside the law—no cheap thing, not a force to be invoked for ordinary reasons. Conscious of responsibility as well as privilege, doubtless, too, she understood the value of not interfering often; privileges, strengthened by their rare use, grow intolerable and are lopped off when they cease to be a nine days’ wonder—which is something that the privileged too seldom bear in mind.

“*Virgo vestalis maxima*, we plead for Britain! Cæsar plans invasion against people who have done no injury to Rome. The Roman law permits him to declare war and to make peace as he chooses, and the Roman senate is as powerless as I am to prevent him. We appeal to you, who are above the Roman law—”

“Cæsar is Pontifex Maximus!” the Vestal interrupted. “I will hear no calumnies.”

But Tros knew that. He knew that Cæsar was the only man on earth who even nominally had authority to discipline the Vestals, and he guessed that was the key to Cæsar’s plans. Though theoretically uncontaminated by political intrigue, the Vestals’ influence was much the subtlest force in Rome; it easily might be the factor that should tip the scales in Cæsar’s favor, more particularly since his influence depended on the plebes, whose favor he had always courted. Not even Marius, nor Sulla at the height of the proscriptions when the garden of his private villa was a torture-yard and headless corpses strewed the paths, had dared to

refuse clemency to any one the Vestals indicated. It was not in the arena only that their thumbs turned upward could avert the very blood-lust of the crowd, though only there, when a man lay bleeding on the sand, was their interference open. It was never challenged, because not abused; they never interfered to save a sentenced criminal. The crowd, that enjoyed butchery ten times as much because it took place in the presence of the Vestals, had an extra thrill whenever the six Virgins autocratically spared a victim. As far-sighted as he was ambitious, Cæsar had chosen the office of Pontifex Maximus as his first step toward making himself master of the whole republic, and there had been many an apparent stroke of luck since then that might have been explained as something far more calculable if the Vestals had not been past-mistresses of silence. Tros's last thought would be to try to turn them against Cæsar.

"I have come to assist Cæsar," he said, swallowing. Resentment against destiny half-choked him. "*Virgo beatissima*, my father was a prince of Samothrace. He foretold, with his last breath, when his spirit stood between two worlds and he could see into the future and the past, that I, his son, should turn away from enmity of Cæsar and befriend him. This I do, not gladly, but with good-will, since I know no other way of saving Britain, and a friendship may not be forgotten for the sake of enmity. The Britons are my friends. So I will yield my enmity and be of use to Cæsar, though three times to his face I have repudiated him."

The Vestal nodded. Though aloofness limits men and women in the field of action, it enlarges their ability to see deep into character.

"How shall you save Britain and be Cæsar's friend?" she asked.

"*Virgo vestalis maxima*, can Rome survive if Cæsar fails?" Tros answered. "He will meet with resistance in the Isle of Britain that will tax his strength and give the Gauls encouragement to rise behind him. What then? Are the patricians strong enough, or well enough

united to keep Rome from anarchy, if Cæsar meets disaster? Can Pompey hold the factions that would fly at one another's throats if Cæsar's standards fell?"

"What if Cæsar should prevail in Britain?" asked the Vestal.

"*Virgo beatissima*, if all Rome's legions should invade that wooded isle, in five years they could not boast they had conquered it! There is a race of men who have defeated Cæsar once. There is a king who will oppose him while the last man breathes."

"Yet Mithridates fell. Is Gaul free?"

"Wait yet for the news of Crassus!" Tros retorted. "Roman arms are not invincible. Let only Crassus meet defeat, and Cæsar fail to conquer Britain—who then shall preserve Rome from the people's tribunes and the mobs? Pompey? The patrician who holds his nose because the rabble's stench offends him? Pompey, who has twice let pass an opportunity to seize the reins? Pompey, who refuses the dictatorship because he knows his popularity would melt like butter in the sun? Pompey, whom the tribunes hate because he lords it over them, and keeps postponing the elections to upset their plans? Will tribunes, and the mobs they lead, serve Pompey—or rebel? And if the people's tribunes should successfully rebel, how long then—"

The Vestal stopped him with a gesture, frowning. It was not compatible with dignity to lend ear to a stranger's views of what demagogues might do to Rome's most sacred institutions.

"For a stranger you are possessed by a strange interest for Rome," she said ironically.

"Rome is not my city, but I know her weakness and her strength," said Tros. "I would rather save Rome than see Britain ravished by the legions to whom Cæsar has been promising the plunder."

"Cæsar is not straw blown by the wind," she answered. "Nor is he a slave to be beckoned—"

Tros slipped a hand under his cloak.

"Nor a hireling to be bought," she added, sure she understood that gesture. "He is not like Cato, who

prefers the lesser of two evils; Cæsar seizes on the greater evil as the keenest weapon. Nor does he resemble Cicero, whom gratitude or grudge can turn into a purblind hypocrite. Cæsar is not Antonius, whom the mob's praise renders drunk. Nor is he a fool like Sulla, using power for revenge; he makes friends of his enemies if they will yield to him. There is no man in the world like Cæsar. Who shall tame his pride?"

"But one may foster it," said Tros, and put his hand under his cloak again. When he drew it forth there rested on his palm a heavy leather bag, not large but tightly filled and tied around the neck with gold wire.

"Why," he asked, "does Cæsar say he goes to Britain? What bid has he made to justify himself?"

The Vestal almost smiled.

"He has told all Rome that he will bring back pearls," she answered, "for a breastplate for the Venus Genetrix."

"These pearls," said Tros, "are plenty for that purpose—I am told they are superior to those that Pompey brought from Asia and put on exhibition in a temple, but did not give. They were entrusted to me by those who ponder over Britain's destiny. I am to use them as I see fit, in the cause of Britain. *Virgo beatissima*, I crave leave to deposit them in your charge, as a trust, for Cæsar's use, to be employed by him to make the breastplate for the goddess, to be known as his gift, if—and only if—he turns back from invading Britain!"

Not one moment did the Vestal hesitate.

"You ask what I may not refuse," she answered. "Whosoever obtains audience may leave whatever sacred things he pleases in my charge. But had I known what you intended you would not have been received! I am not Cæsar's monitor; nor have I any means of reaching him. If it were known in Rome that—"

She glanced sharply at the younger Vestal—then at the lictor over by the door—then swiftly into the

shadows where her women stood, all eyes—but they were out of earshot.

“Were it known that I send messengers to Cæsar,” she said, lowering her voice, “all Rome would say the Vestal Virgins are no longer higher than intrigue. And Cæsar’s ways are too well known. No woman corresponds with Cæsar and remains above suspicion.”

“*Virgo beatissima*, send me!” said Tros. “I have a ship—my own swift, splendid ship, well manned. By the unutterable Name, I swear that rather than betray you to the Romans I will taste death sooner than my destiny intends, and every man of mine shall taste it with me! I fulfil a friendship, than which no more godlike course is open to a man in this life. And I hold that he who trims his sails to catch the gods’ wind, wrecks his soul if he breaks faith! If you think Cæsar can save Rome from anarchy, send me to save him from invading Britain, where he will only squander strength and wreak a havoc, while Rome dies, mad and masterless!”

“I can not protect you. I can not acknowledge you—except to Cæsar,” said the Vestal.

“Let the gods protect me! Let the gods acknowledge me!” Tros answered. “If I will do my duty they will do theirs.”

For a while the Vestal pondered that, chin resting on her hand, her elbow on the chair-arm.

“Cæsar’s pride will be well satisfied,” she said at last. “If he could make believe he had brought pearls from Britain for the Venus Genetrix—he might assert they are a tribute from the Britons—that would glut his craving for renown, at least a little while. He is a madman with a god’s ability, a man’s lust to appear generous, and a fool’s ignorance of where to stop and when to turn. He might have been a god. He is a devil. But he can save Rome, being ruthless, and because, although he panders to the mob, he will deceive them, saving Rome’s heart, seeming to supplant her head. Rome may live because of Cæsar and in spite of him.”

“I am not Rome’s advocate, but I will serve Rome for the sake of Britain,” Tros exclaimed. He held the



bag of pearls out in his right hand, kneeling. "*Virgo beatissima*, so send me now to Cæsar with your word."

The Vestal took the bag of pearls into her lap and Tros stood up. Not even in a climax of emotion did it suit his nature to stay long on bent knee. Even reverence had limits.

The Vestal beckoned and a woman came; she whispered and the woman brought a golden bowl, engraved with figures of the Muses, that had once adorned a temple before Sulla raped the shrines of Hellas. When the woman had retired into the shadows she undid the golden thread and poured the pearls into the bowl, the other Vestal leaning to admire them, not exclaiming and not opening her lips—but her nostrils and her throat moved suddenly as if she caught her breath. Tros had not enlarged beyond the bounds of truth. Not even Rome that plundered Ephesus had seen such treasure in one heap. Those pearls, under the lamp light, were like tears shed by a conquered people's gods.

"Draw nearer," said the Vestal, and again Tros knelt, that she might whisper in his ear. She said one word, then laid her finger on his lips.

"That word," she said, "will be sufficient proof to Cæsar that you come from me. He will believe your lips. But if you use it falsely, then I know of no death and of no curse that were not bliss as compared to what your destiny will hold! There are degrees of shame below the reach of thought. And there are depths of misery where worms that crawl in corruption appear godlike in comparison to him who dies so deep! Not Tantalus, who told the secrets of the gods, knows suffering so dreadful, as shall he who violates that confidence!"

"I keep faith, not from fear," Tros answered, rising stubbornly. "What word shall I take to Cæsar?"

"Bid him look toward Rome! Bid him waste no energy, but keep his hands on Gaul, that when the hour strikes he may leave Gaul tranquil at his back."

Tros bowed. Her attitude appeared to signify the

interview was over, but he had a task yet—and he needed for it greater daring than he had yet summoned from the storehouse of his faith in the invincibility of promises performed. He had assured Helene he would do her no harm if she trusted him; his own interpretation of that promise was a thousand times more generous than any she was likely to assume. Mistaken he had been in letting Zeuxis guide him to her house, and he had made a worse mistake confiding in her; but none of that was her fault. He would set right the results of that—and yet if he proposed to save her from the prætor's torturers he must summon enough brazen impudence to plead, before a woman whose authority depended on her chastity, for mercy for an alien whose insolent contempt of chastity was typical of what was steadily destroying Rome!

He made abrupt, curt work of it:

"If Cæsar is to save Rōme, let him use all agencies," he said. "There is a woman in the clutches of the prætor's men, whom Cæsar had employed to ferret information. Helene, the daughter of Theseus of Alexandria—"

"That immodest rake—!"

"Is Cæsar an immaculate?"

"Cæsar is Pontifex Maximus. For Rome, and for the sake of institutions older than the city, I let myself see only Cæsar's virtue. For that woman I will not offend against the public decency by turning up my thumb!"

"*Virgo beatissima*, let Pompey carry that blame!" Tros retorted. "He has violated modesty so often that one more offense will hardly spoil his record! I am told he comes—"

"At dawn," she said, "to offer sacrifices for his wife's recovery."

"*Virgo vestalis maxima*, one word from you will be enough. If Cæsar's daughter—Pompey's wife—dies, who then shall keep Pompey from defying Cæsar? Will the mob not rend Rome unless Cæsar can prevail over the patrician factions, into whose hands Pompey

will deliver Rome's fate? And shall Cæsar be allowed to fail because, forsooth, unquestioned chastity was timid and too careful of itself to whisper in behalf of Cæsar's spy?"

"You overstep your privilege," the Vestal answered frowning. "I will mention her to Pompey. I will keep these pearls in trust, for Cæsar's gift to Venus Genetrix, provided he draws back from Britain. But remember—I can not protect you or acknowledge you. Farewell."

She rose, inclining her head slightly in reply to Tros's salute, her dark eyes curiously scanning Orwic, whose expression suggested a schoolboy's when a lesson-period was over.

"This way!" said the lictor loudly. "This way! More to the right!" Tros and Orwic backed, until the silent door shut slowly in their faces and they turned, expecting to be greeted by the Northmen.

They were gone! The portico was empty. Silence, silver moonlight and a Forum peopled only by the statues and the watchful guards, who leaned against the closed shop-windows.

Silently a lictor, followed by a file of four men in the Vestals' livery, emerged out of the shadows and stood guard before the Vestals' door.

"Move on!" he ordered arrogantly. "This is no place for loiterers!"

## Chapter XXV

### THE PRÆTOR'S DUNGEON

*I have seen more lands than many men have heard of, and more dungeons than most men believe there are. Ever I visit dungeons, because their keepers are seldom as cruel as their masters who commit the victims to living death in the name of justice. Many a man, for a coin or two to ease a jailor's avarice, has died on parchment. Many a corpse has pulled an oar*

on my ship—aye, and pulled well, no better, it may be, but at least no worse for freedom and work.

If I see a city's dungeons, thereafter that city's rulers are an open book. The worse the dungeon, the more surely the city's rulers are unfit to clean it; justice is for sale in that city, and its dungeons are a likeness of its rulers' hearts.

From The Log of Tros of Samothrace

Tros's first impulse was to rush around corners and hunt for his men. Orwic's bewilderment brought out his reserves of level-headedness.

"If they are near, we shall soon know it," he said, shrugging off the tremor he felt creeping up his spine. "If they are far, then only wits, not feet, can find them."

He strode up to the nearest watchman, who lounged against a shop-front entertaining himself by plaiting a wrist-thong for the vicious looking bill-hook of a weapon that he carried. The free man, an Etruscan, merely grinned when questioned, spat, and called Tros "pretty Hercules"—then asked whether the gods had use for money on Olympus. Tros produced a coin. The Etruscan spun it in the air. As he caught it back-handed and spun it again he answered Tros's question by putting another:

"Will they seat you in among the *equites*? Or are you an ambassador? The senate sometimes entertains ambassadors in very good seats, but the compliment fools nobody. Ambassadors in Rome pay richly for whatever courtesy they get. Me? I am paid to guard this goldsmith's. Is there no more money in Olympus? Have our Roman armies stripped that treasury, too?"

Tros showed him another coin and let the moonlight glint on it.

"Which way did my men go?" he asked. "Who took them?"

"How should I know they were *your* men? Who else should know it, either? I should say they were suspi-

cious characters and that's what the prætor's man thought, evidently."

Fifty guards could not have arrested his Northmen without a clamor that would have wakened Rome. There had been trickery, not violence. He showed the coin again.

"The prætor's man may have thought there was a bribelet to pick up, but he could not make those wooden-headed fellows understand him. What were they doing, lurking in the Vestals' portico? He had a right to order them away. But it is forbidden to make noises there at night, so he tried arguing, instead of sending his runner to turn out the guard. But I daresay he would have had to turn out the guard all the same—for they were dumb fools—if a fellow who looked like a Greek hadn't turned up and told them to follow him. They went like goats after a piping boy. Ss-s-s-t! Haven't you forgotten something? Gold, eh? Hercules, I thank you! If I weren't afraid to lose my sinecure, employment being none too plentiful for free men nowadays, I might advise you to go hunting for your men not far from Pompey's school of gladiators. Things being as they are, I don't dare to give advice; the owner of this place I'm paid to watch is one of Pompey's clients. What breed of barbarian is that one?"

He pointed to Orwic, who stood like a statue, moon behind him, peering into gloom along the Via Sacra.

"I would give a month's pay to see you and him in the arena! You should wield a club, like Hercules, or take the *coestus*. He looks like a *retiarius*—as agile as a leopard—look at him! See how he supples his loins when he moves!"

"Would you know the Greek again who led my men away?" Tros asked him.

"Maybe. But I also know on which side of the street the sun shines. Even in the senate there is only Cato who tells all he knows. Perhaps he likes to have stones thrown at him! For myself, a little bread and wine and olives, with a ticket for the circus now and then, seems better than wagging the tongue and what comes of it. But I have seen that Greek in company with Zeuxis,



who is one of the contractors who—but I am not a woman. My peculiarity is silence as to matters that are no concern of mine.”

The news that Zeuxis had a hand in the betrayal of his men made Tros draw on instantly his full protective armor of dissimulation. He hid his consternation—swallowed it—suppressed it—grinned—put his wits to work. He knew the Greek mind. He could outplay Zeuxis!

It was no use going to him; direct means would be met with plausible obscurity—countered with guile. He must be indirect, and swift.

“You have relieved my mind, my friend,” he said to the Etruscan. “Now I know where I can find my men, and that is worth another coin or two—here—pocket these. For a moment I feared my men had met such a fate as that woman Helene’s, whom the prætor dragged out of her house! What happened to her? Was she thrown into the Tullianum?”

“Hardly!” The Etruscan laughed. “She is worth too much to be let rot in that hole. Not even Cato would do that with her. Cato is economical. That Tullianum is a pesthouse; there’s a dark hole where they lower them and let them perish of disease or hunger. I have seen it; I was sent in with a message for Septimus Varro, who was the custodian until they caught him substituting corpses for the prisoners whose friends had money and were free with it. Varro was crucified; so money isn’t everything, after all; but I never heard that the men who bribed him suffered. If you asked me, I should say that some of Cato’s men will disobey him and take as good care of Helene as they think her fashionable friends will pay for. Cato might have her scourged—he’s a stern man, Cato is—but that won’t happen until to-morrow or the next day, when he tries her case in public. Meanwhile, she’ll be lodged under the prætor’s office; you can see the front wall of the cells from here, but where she’ll be is ’round behind; they’d be afraid to keep her where her friends might rescue her.”

“She’ll be guarded closely.”

"Not a doubt of it. But prætor's cells are not the Tullianum. Any one with money in his hand can see a prisoner on one excuse or other—that is, if the torturers aren't busy with them; now and then they torture some one all night long to save the magistrate's time next morning, but you can generally hear the outcry when they're doing that. You see, they can't take evidence from slaves unless they're tortured first, and any one who's not a Roman citizen is liable to have his testimony questioned with a hot iron. That's a good law; it makes citizenship valued—not that citizens aren't liars, but they've a right to be privileged over mere colonials and slaves and aliens. If everybody was allowed to tell lies in the law-courts how could justice be administered?"

Tros walked away, but the Etruscan went on talking to the night. Orwic stepped forth like a shadow from among the statues in the Forum and followed Tros, who led toward the prætor's office. There were no lictors on the portico, they being personal attendants on the magistrate; in place of them a guardian as grim as Cato, without Cato's dignity, yawned while he watched three underlings throw dice beside a lantern.

"Halt!" he ordered, as Tros started up the steps. "No visitors. The prætor will be here soon after sunrise."

"I have urgent business," said Tros.

"Who cares? Have you a permit? Jupiter! Am I to be disturbed all night long by the gallants who buzz for that woman Helene like flies after fruit? Get hence!"

But already Tros stood on the portico. The guards ceased throwing dice to stare at him and reached into the shadow for their weapons, but none showed any eagerness to be the first to try to throw him down the steps. Their chief, a fat man with a double chin and strange, old-fashioned keys hung from a big ring fastened to the girth on his big belly, puffed his cheeks out and exploded, tilting back his stool on one leg:

"Jupiter! What now? Did you hear me tell you to be

gone? By sulphury Cocytus—”

“I have heard,” Tros answered. “You have yet to hear. Come yonder and speak alone with me.”

He strode along the portico and waited, leaving Orwic standing near the upper step. Inquisitive, astonished, curious — inclined to continue asserting his official consequence, but growing cautious now that he could see the gold embroidery on Tros’s cloak — he with the two-fold chin said something to his men about observing Orwic and, arranging his own cloak over his great belly, shuffled toward Tros, his slippers rutching on the stone.

“It is no use, master. I have turned away two-score of gallants, though they offered me enough coin to have bought the next election! There are definite orders. The prætor has —”

Tros interrupted:

“Cackler! I have come from Pompey, who intends to set the woman free. Have you not heard that Pompey entered Rome?”

“By Venus, who did not hear? He and his men made noise enough! But what has that to do with me?”

“If you wish Pompey’s favor you will let me in and let me speak to her.”

“Nay, master! Nay, nay! It is all my place is worth! If Pompey wants to override the prætor’s orders, let him come himself! I mean no disrespect for Pompey. Bacchus knows, I drank to him but two hours since. I wish him the dictatorship. But Gemini! What sort of guardian does he think I am, that he should send a stranger to me — and no writing — not a signet — nothing? Tell me your name. Who are you? Offer me a proof that you are Pompey’s messenger.”

Tros could invent a tale more suddenly than any Parthian could wing an arrow on its way. His amber eyes, glowing in the moonlight, looked like pools of honesty; his bravery of bearing and his air of power in restraint aroused conviction. It was next thing to impossible to guess that he was lying. Even that fa-

miliar of courthouse perjury and criminal intrigue believed him.

"Pompey was in great haste," Tros said, speaking swiftly. "As an act of generosity to Cæsar, he intends to set that woman free because he knows she has been doing Cæsar's errands. He will make no scandal. Therefore, he will first see Cato in the morning. Meanwhile, he dreads that the woman, in fear, may reveal such information as she has, and to prevent that he has sent me to assure her she shall go free. There was neither time to write a permit, nor would that have been discreet; such messages are best conveyed by word of mouth. He told me, though, that I should find you are a man of excellent discretion who would have no scruples about doing him this favor when the matter is explained. I am to tell you, you may look to him for favorable notice."

"Did he tell you my name?" asked the keeper of the keys, a shadow of suspicion dimming credulity.

"No. Neither he, nor any of his friends remembered it. He called his secretary, but the secretary had forgotten, too. A nobleman like Pompey has so many interests, it would be strange if he could name you off-hand."

"He is likely to forget this service just as easily," the other grumbled.

"Aye, he might," said Tros. "Great men are not fastidious rememberers! But that is my responsibility; you may depend on me to keep you in mind. Lead on; I have to make haste; I must report to Pompey before daylight."

Doubtfully shaking his keys — although he did not any longer doubt Tros's story — the man led the way into the prætor's office, down a dimly lighted stairway and along a passage stifling with dampness and the smell of dungeons.

"Look you!" he said, turning suddenly where a guttering candle threw distorted shadows on an ancient wall. "Is this a trick? We lost two prisoners a week ago through people passing poison in to

them. They dread the torture and their friends dread revelations! You're not meaning to slip her a dagger? No phials — nothing of that sort? Cato would have me scourged if I should lose one as likely to tell other folks' secrets as she is. Well — you can't go in. You'll have to speak to her through the grating, and mind you, I'll watch. I want to see both your hands the whole time."

Tros clasped his hands behind him. The custodian led toward a heavy oaken door and hammered on it with his keys. The thump and jingle brought a dozen answers from the near-by cells, including one that cried out from the dark for water:

"I will tell all! Only give me a drink and I will tell all I know!"

"Time for that in the morning!" said the jailer. "Silence!"

He shook the keys again and slapped Helene's cell door with his flat palm.

"Mistress!" he whispered hoarsely, "wake up! Here's a visitor — and as you love your life, don't let a soul know I admitted him! Understand now — if you get me in trouble over this —"

"Who is it?"

Fingers appeared through the grating and a nose was pressed against it.

"Keep those hands down! You may talk to him, but if I see a thing passed in there'll be trouble! Now," he said, signing to Tros. "Be quick and keep your voice low. There are three-score ears, all listening."

Tros stepped up to the grating, keeping his hands clasped behind his back where the custodian could watch them in the candle-light.

"Water! Water! I'll be dead if you don't let me drink! I'm dying now!" the voice croaked from the darkness.

"Silence!" roared the jailer, "or I'll let you know what thirst is! Shall I fetch salt?"

That threat was enough. The passage ceiling ceased



to echo to the cries. There fell the silence of a tomb, irregularly broken by the clank of fetters and the dripping of some water set where the man in agony of thirst could hear it.

"Who are you? I can't see you," said Helene's voice.

"Tros of Samothrace."

"You! You! I have friends who will —"

"Sh-sh-sh-sh! I received word that Cato had ordered you seized. I have worked to release you, and I know now I can manage it."

"How? Who?"

"Never mind. Cato is determined to have you scourged as an example, and the more your friends try to dissuade him the more determined he will be."

"By Isis! It is I who will prevent that! I have death-drops hidden. Even Romans don't flog corpses!"

"Sh-sh-sh-sh! There are greater ones in Rome than Cato. I have influence. By noon to-morrow you shall go free. But remember — you will owe your liberty to me and you will have to recompense me."

"How? They will have looted all my property! The rascal who owns my house will have put his bailiffs in already. They have chained my slaves. It will take me months to recover, even if I don't catch plague in this pest-hole! The worst is the Cæsar is sure to hear of it. He'll say I'm an incompetent and never trust me any more. I'm ruined!"

"No," said Tros, "but you might easily be ruined if you failed to keep in my good graces! I will make your peace with Cæsar, if you —"

"You? You are Cæsar's enemy!"

"Not I. Now listen. It is Pompey who will order your release, but he will do it proudly and against his will. Don't trust him, but pretend to trust him. When they let you out, go straight to the house of Zeuxis and pretend to Zeuxis that you don't know it was he who betrayed both of us."

"He? Zeuxis? What has he done?"

"Nothing that can not be undone. I will tell you

when we meet at Zeuxis' house. He wants my pearls. He thought I had entrusted some of them to you —"

"The Greek dog!"

"Watch him! Aid me to make use of him and I will stand by you as long as you deserve my confidence."

The custodian rattled his keys.

"Make haste!" he urged. "There's no knowing when they'll bring in prisoners. It's all my place is worth to have you seen down here!"

"Are we agreed?" Tros asked, his face against the bars, for he was curious to see what clothing they had left her and whether she was locked into a less filthy dungeon than the others. Suddenly Helene pressed her lips between the bars and kissed him.

"Aye! Agreed!" she said, and laughed. "I am no imbecile, Tros of Samothrace! You need me, or you would never have stirred a finger to release me. You shall have me!"

"Come!" exclaimed the jailer. "Come now! You have been here long enough to tell the story of the fall of Troy!"

He took Tros by the arm and tugged at him. As Tros turned, scowling at the prospect of intrigue with any kind of woman, he could hear Helene's voice, half-mocking but vibrating with excitement, as she whispered:

"It was Tros who founded Troy! Argive Helen owes a recompense to Tros! I think his gods have set this table for a feast of the affections! Go and lay an offering on Venus' altar, with a gift from me beside it!"

## Chapter XXVI

### POMPEIUS MAGNUS

*I am not of their number who deny the virtue or the greatness of a man because he lacks a touch or two of modesty and honesty. I make allowances for the poison of his flatterers, whose filthy lies would*

*rot a man of iron. But what he has done is not my measure. What is he doing? What will he do? I have seen men so proud of their record that they view the future through a veil of vanity on which the past is painted. Their future discovers such men trying to relive the echoes of the deeds they once did.*

From The Log of Tros of Samothrace

Dawn found Tros and Orwic striding gloomily along the Via Sacra, turning and returning until they knew by heart the statues and the very cracks between the flagstones. Dust was stirred into their nostrils by the city slaves, who appeared in an army to sprinkle and sweep, their overseers watchful to pounce on coins or jewelry. One slave was flogged until he lay half stunned for trying to secrete a coin he picked out of a gutter.

Very shortly after dawn, demolition resumed where Cæsar's agents had bought up the ancient buildings, and the usual cursing and thrashing attended the first speeding up of sleepy slave, dog-weary from the day before. Draft animals were better treated, having cost more money; there was scarcity of horses, and the price of meat was higher than when Spartacus had raided the Campagna, but since Pompey drove the pirates from the seas there had been no interruption in the streams of slaves that found their way to market, so a slave of the laboring sort cost very little. It was reckoned economical to work a man to death and buy another in his place.

The hurried sweeping done, on temple porticos and at an altar in the middle of the Forum, shaven-headed priests went through a ritual of invocation. There appeared to be a competition between temples to see which could hurry fastest through the service, for the wind had risen and the clouds of dust made the increasing heat unbearable. Dust gritted in the teeth and filled the nostrils; it was underfoot again in gray drifts almost as soon as the sweeper gangs had vanished.

Shops were opened, and the yawning shop-assist-

ants sunned themselves, greeting their neighbors and cursing the builders who obliged them to clean shop so constantly. There was a sudden roar of voices and a fire-brigade, all clad in leather and brass helmets, streamed across the Forum carrying their ladders, ropes, poles and leather buckets — hundreds of buckets all nested together, for use by any slave or citizen they could impress into the service. Their united shout was like a war-cry:

“Crassus! Crassus!”

In his absence Crassus' agents were neglecting no chance to make money for their master; they preserved Rome from the flames, but he was richer by each fire they extinguished, though they forced the passers-by to form the bucket gangs and drove the neighbors' slaves into the hottest smoke.

And Pompey not yet. It was two hours after dawn before he came, on a big bay horse, magnificent in golden armor, attended by a host of friends and followed by a roaring crowd that choked the Via Sacra, thundering his praises. There was no name too good; imperator was the mildest; half the crowd was calling him dictator, he occasionally making modest efforts to take the crowd at its word. He shook his head repeatedly.

No armed men followed him. There were a dozen men on horseback and at least three times as many walking, all wearing the deep blue-bordered toga of the *equites* and each man followed by his personal attendants. Pompey's own slaves were innumerable. It was their task to keep the crowd from swarming in on the procession, and their method varied from remonstrance to the use of heavy cudgels.

In among the horsemen behind Pompey was a litter borne by slaves and loaded heavily with gifts; between the folds of linen that protected them from dust the glint of gold shone now and then; it was not Pompey's way to ask a favor of the gods without enriching their establishments with plunder from the fanes of other gods less fortunate.

The crowd swarmed in among the statues, yelling, and a company of Pompey's slaves ran in among them, handing out free tickets for the races and the ensuing combats between gladiators in the Circus Maximus. Speculators bought up the tickets promptly. Tros and Orwic each received a ticket as they worked their way into the crowd toward the semicircle formed by Pompey's friends and attendants facing the shrine of Vesta. It was only by dint of struggling that they came within two paces of a horse's heels.

Pompey, in the middle of the semicircle, swung down from his horse and strode with all a Roman's dignity toward the entrance of the shrine, his white cloak that he wore against the dust revealing as it fluttered in the wind flashes of his golden corselet. The slave-borne litter followed him. In the porch before the shrine the slaves knelt, waiting until the Vestals' women came, white robed and wearing rosaries, to bear the gifts within. At each gift that they took up from the litter all the women bowed to Pompey, he saluting with his right hand raised. He was a splendid figure. He stood like a god in armor — which was two-thirds of the secret of his influence; the mob roared satisfaction at the very way he walked.

When the gifts were gone he strode into the shrine alone, as if he were the sun-god come to visit the undying fire. As imperator, triumvir and priest, his eyes were hallowed and his person sacrosanct. He never doubted it. No shrine was closed to him — although the very Roman brothels gasped when it was known that in Jerusalem he had invaded the Jews' inner shrine to look, as it was said, into the face of Jahveh. Pompey, but not many Romans other than the ritually ordained priests — and they but seldom, at appointed times — might see the sacred fire and the historic image of archaic Pallas, brought by Æneas from the burning Troy; but there was skepticism on the faces of his friends, and there were dry jests on their lips. Tros heard some conversation:



"Gemini! If Julia dies in spite of all this, he'll regret those costly gifts!"

"What odds? The Vestals will find some suitable explanation. Even Vestal Virgins die, you know."

A shrew-faced man, between the two who had just spoken, laughed.

"The point is, Pompey has paid handsomely for something. Wait and see. If he should win the Vestals' influence—"

"*Phagh!* All he can expect from them is 'thumbs up' if his fancy gladiator gets the worst of it. The Vestals serve their pontifex. I told him only last week, he must find some way of weakening the Vestals if he hopes to outbid Cæsar for the mob's vote. Bury one of them alive at the Porta Collina — you can prove a case against any one by torturing a dozen slaves — and —"

"Sh-sh-sh-sh!"

"What frightens you? Convict one of unchastity, and for a year to come the sweet unsensuous crowd would talk about abolishing religion! That would cost Cæsar his grip on the plebes. It's the plebes who —"

"Who would have you crucified if they could hear you talking! Have you placed your bets yet on the races? Which team do you favor?"

"I don't know yet. I usually bet on white, but I have heard Helene the Alexandrian has a team of Cappadocians that she will enter, and they say she has adopted red — the gods know why! You'd think a woman of her laxity would choose the virgin's color! I have heard, too, that she wished to drive the four-horse team but was forbidden. If I knew who is to take her place I might bet on those Cappadocians — I've seen them — gorgeous beasts! And besides, I consulted the auguries —"

"Hah! And were informed, no doubt, that red might win unless the white should have the best of it! Who wouldn't be an augur! They make money either way — no need to bet! I'll wager you weren't

warned that the prætor's men would seize Helene yesterday! There's a rumor that Cato means to have her scourged and driven out of Rome."

"*Jupiter omnipotens!* Is Cato crazy?"

"Probably. He'll do it, if he's sure it would annoy some political enemy. He likes to be pelted with stones and vegetables. It makes him feel honest. And he thinks nobody will dare to kill him."

"He'll discover his mistake if he scourges Helene! If he threw her to the beasts the mob might stand for it, because they'd have the spectacle. But scourge her? I think not. If he did that, whoever killed Cato could be sure of the mob's verdict."

"It wouldn't surprise me to know that Cato would enjoy death if it came to him in that way! The man isn't in his right mind. Did you hear how he gave his wife to young Hortensius? They say Alilia, his new wife, can't endure him; he goes bare-footed through the streets and thinks she ought to do the same! I've heard — Venus! Look at Pompey's face! Has he been trying to seduce a Vestal? Somebody has slapped him!"

Pompey was looking indignant. He was flushed. He tried to hide embarrassment by adjusting his cloak as he strode from the shrine, but he only succeeded in looking too proud to share his annoyance with any one else. His very gesture, as he drew the cloak around him, was a service of warning to friends not to question him. His lips were shut tight.

Tros tugged the nearest Roman's cloak.

"I have urgent business with Pompey. He expects me. Make way."

"Jupiter, what insolence! Stand back!"

"If I should have to shout to him," said Tros, "you might regret it. I am Tros of Samothrace."

"Oh. He who stopped him at the bridge last night? Save yourself trouble then. Pompey has changed his mind; your news, whatever it is, has ceased to interest him. Stand back!"

It was no use courting dagger-blades, and from the

rear of the crowd was roaring a new tumult, drowning speech. Though Tros had shouted to the limit of his lungs there was no chance that Pompey's ears would pick out one voice from the din. The crowd had swarmed up on the statues. There were men on the backs of other men — all yelling, and the pressure from the rear to catch sight of Pompey as he mounted his horse was prodigious. Dust was mixed with the sweat on men's faces. Tros could hardly breathe.

However, Orwic was beside him, smiling, masking his emotions.

“Stiffen yourself! Seize my foot!”

Tros sprang on Orwic's shoulders, balancing himself by setting one foot on a man's head, sparing his victim a swift smile that excused the liberty. Then Pompey could not help but see him; he was gorgeous in his cloak — a black-haired, handsome figure, like a gold-embroidered god, miraculously raised above a sea of faces.

Pompey hesitated. Tros — salt-sea-taught to use his helm between the waves — made up his mind for him. He sprang, as if thrown by the roars of the mob, and came down like a wedge between two of the horses that blocked the way. They reared and shied away from him and through the opened gap between their shoulders, quicker than a horseman could have drawn a dagger, Tros strode up to where the slaves held Pompey's horse. Still Pompey hesitated, frowning.

So they met on level flagstones, eye to eye. Pompey lacked the great advantage of the night before, when he could talk down proudly from his horse and Tros must look up like a poor petitioner. True, if Pompey had made but a sign, there would have been a dozen daggers buried in Tros's back before he could have turned; but Pompey was a lot too proud to trifle with that sort of cowardice; he threw his hand up to restrain his men and faced Tros with a curling lip.

“Mercury! You reach your goal!” he said, eyeing him steadily. Then he lowered his voice, so that not even the slaves who held his horse could overhear.

"So you are Cæsar's man! You come here plotting against Cæsar — and yet serve him? I have heard you bearded Cato. Cato himself said it! Fool! The very whispers of the senate reach my ears! And now what? I am told that I must not harm Tros of Samothrace! I come to read the embers for an augury — my wife is ill — I seek foreknowledge of her destiny — and I am told I must give no offense to Tros of Samothrace! Have you the ear, then, of the Vestals? Are you Cæsar's spy?"

Tros answered without betraying that he recognized the danger he was in:

"Pompeius Magnus, if the Vestals so admonished you regarding me, shall I believe they were the first to speak of me? Or did a spy report my movements? Did the man who stole my men say how it happened they stood leaderless? Then you — deliberating whether it were safe to throw my men into the arena — wondering what influence I might have — doubting your spy's word, possibly — inquired about me of the Vestals. Is it not so?"

"Meddler! What do you in Rome?" demanded Pompey.

"Triumvir, I turn my back on Rome the instant you return my men to me!"

"It seems to me that Tros of Samothrace may harm himself," said Pompey. "Men armed with daggers in Rome in the night are not immune from interference because Tros of Samothrace pretends he owns them! Are they citizens? Are *you* a citizen? Are you a peregrine? Are you a citizen of any state allied to Rome or even recognized by the senate and the Roman people? Have you any rights in Rome whatever — of person or property? And, if those men are truly yours, may you possess them under the Roman law? If not yours, are they free — and if so by what right? If they are not free, then who is their master?"

It appeared to Tros that the triumvir was lashing himself into a rage deliberately — possible to justify a course of conduct not in keeping with his dignity,

whatever law might have to say about it. Pompey's eyes — full, lustrous and intelligent — eyes normally suggesting rather tolerant autocracy, betrayed unsteadiness. He was expecting something — bullying and threatening in hope of forcing information without actually asking for it.

"It appears to me," he said, "that Cato has arrested the wrong malefactor. He should set Helene free and question your activities!"

Tros held his tongue.

"It is not of your men you wished to speak when you accosted me at the bridge last night," said Pompey.

There was still that look of speculation in his eyes — almost of irresolution. He seemed to be giving Tros an opportunity to volunteer some information that he needed. Pompey, potential autocrat of two-thirds of the world, had far too many sources of information to make it safe to trifle with him — too many irons in the fire for any visitor in Rome to touch the right one at a guess without more luck than any reasonable man could look for.

"You have sent a man to Ostia," said Pompey suddenly. "How did you enter Italy? By land or sea?" Then, as Tros still held his tongue, "I am told you landed at Tarentum. Your ship will come to Ostia?"

That prodded Tros on his Achilles' heel! That ship was to her master and designer as a woman is to most men. Tros lied desperately — instantly.

"That ship is Cæsar's! I have authority from Cæsar to use all Roman ports."

He drew out from his cloak the parchment Cæsar had been forced to sign in Gades — unrolled it — flourished it — thrust it under Pompey's eyes, pointing to the seal — the beautifully modelled figure of Cæsar, naked, in the guise of Hermes. Pompey did not even glance at what was written; the proud sullenness of his eyes increased.



“Cæsar’s protection? You had nothing you wished to say? No message?”

“I demand my men.”

“Let Cæsar attend to it!” said Pompey. “Let me see that parchment.”

He held out his hand but Tros thrust the parchment back under his cloak. There was nothing on it stating that the ship was Cæsar’s; to the contrary, it definitely named Tros as the owner, merely authorizing him to enter and to clear from Roman ports for purposes of commerce. There were doubtless flaws in it that any legal mind could drive a wedge through instantly; it was even doubtful whether Pompey would need lawyers; since the war against the pirates his authority with shipping had been almost absolute.

Tros’s back was cold; he sensed a climax now with the same nerves that always warned him of a coming storm at sea. But Pompey was an expert at deferring climax:

“That is all then,” he said, turning to his horse, and at his gesture three intimates strode from the ranks. They pretended to help him to mount, but insolently shouldered Tros out of the way, turning their backs to him. Two horsemen beckoned, making a narrow gap in the ranks, sneering as Tros went by. The very crowd, still yelling Pompey’s praises, knew he had been rebuffed; a thousand eyes had seen him flourishing the parchment. It was usual to try to thrust petitions into great men’s hands, and though such documents were usually tossed to secretaries who ignored them, it was customary to accept them formally unless the individual petitioned wished to snub the applicant.

So the crowd mocked. When he made his way to Orwic’s side and they began to force a way together through the throng some humorist made fun of the moustache that drooped on either side of Orwic’s mouth. Then Tros’s gold forehead-band came in for comment. In another minute he was forced to doff his cloak and fold it to prevent its being torn off.

Some men thought he was a Parthian, come craving relief from Crassus' legions; they yelled at him "Crassus! Crassus!" until those who could not see believed the fire-brigade was coming and divided down the midst.

So, down that rift, sweating and indignant, Tros and Orwic bolted into the comparative seclusion of the side-streets, where they turned at last into a fly-blown cook-shop and, discovering a table in an alcove at the rear, ate food concocted from the meat bought from temple priests — whose incomes were increased enormously by selling the fat carcasses donated by the pious for the satisfying of the gods.

"I wager we are eating Great Jove's heifer!" Tros remarked. "Be that an omen! Fragments from Olympus' table fortify us! If the gods of earth and sky are not asleep they — Orwic — has it ever dawned on your imagination that the gods ought to be grateful to us men for giving them an opportunity to use their virtue?"

"Nothing dawns on me at all," said Orwic. "It appears to me we have a lost cause. We are two lone men in Rome, and all Rome seems to be our enemy."

"No, for there are honest men in Rome," Tros answered. "I have made an enemy of Pompey. He is irritated because I went over his head to the Vestals. Arrogant aristocrat! He will hardly dare to disobey them openly, but neither will he swallow what he thinks is an indignity. A man in Pompey's shoes needs only to nod and there are fifty men at once to do whatever work he thinks too dirty for his own white hands. Indeed, I tell you, Orwic, a whole host of gods has reason to be grateful to us for an opportunity. Let them act godlike!"

## *Chapter XXVII*

### *THE CARCERES AND NEPOS, THE LANISTA*

*Weigh well thy motives, trusting destiny to weigh thy deeds. I have heard this—it was Cæsar said it—that*

*a captain should mother his men because he may need them later and they will die more bravely for a captain who has showed them lovingkindness as well as strength. But I think otherwise. I say a captain who has not lovingkindness for his men is unfit to be died for. If he understand not that they need him, and be not ready to die with them, in an hour of worst need he shall learn that he knew not what leadership is.*

From The Log of Tros of Samothrace

Tros's attitude was brave, but in his heart was nothing to support it. He was on the deepest bottom of despair. The need of keeping up appearances for Orwic's sake alone prevented him from giving way. He was a man who lived by energy; the exercise of will invoked new powers of imagination. But now that there seemed no concrete thing to do, his very will dried up.

Thrusting the unfinished food aside he rallied himself by summing up the facts, inviting Orwic to discover a solution. He slew flies with a spoon, arranging them in geometrical designs on the cook-shop table—one design for each fact, involutions indicating intricacy; then, thumbing off the gravy from his plate, he tried to work the calculus by smearing all the facts together into one plan.

“Zeuxis—who doesn't know yet that I know his treachery. That one's Zeuxis. He believes I'm carrying a thousand pearls under my cloak. Zeuxis, or else Nepos—very likely both of them—sent word to one of Pompey's agents that my men would make good gladiators. Probably the agent acted on his own responsibility, consulting Pompey afterwards—perfectly simple—sent one of Zeuxis' servants, whom they'd recognize, to tell my Northmen—in Gaulish, which they'd understand sufficiently to get his meaning—that I'd come out of the Vestals' palace through a back door, or by an underground passage or some such story. They supposed I'd sent for them—and walked straight into an ambush.

“Helene—presently at liberty and dangerous. There’s Helene—that one. Has her eyes on me—anticipates a drama of affection, and the least she’ll do will be to stir the jealousy of half-a-dozen dagger-digging sons of *equites*! Cæsar’s spy. Probably knows enough to black-mail any one in Rome except Cato. Very likely she can help by an appeal to Cæsar’s agents, of whom Memmius, a candidate for consul, is the foremost in the public eye. Call that one Memmius—a very doubtful quantity—a politician; anything that he does will be paid for through the nose by some one. All those other flies near Memmius are politicians, each with his palm itching for a bribe—which each of them would pocket and forget!

“The senate. Those flies are the senate—not sitting—too hot for them, more ways than one, and the Forum too noisy, not counting the danger of riots. Villas in the country are more dignified. Only a small committee of the senate holding meetings behind locked doors in the temple of Castor and Pollux. There’s the committee—probably inaccessible, but said to be plotting against Pompey, whom they hate nearly as much as they hate Cæsar and with equal cause.

“Cato—prætor and a member of the senatorial committee. If we *could* see the committee Cato would be there, and he’s the only man in Rome who dares to challenge Pompey openly; but the rest of them hate Cato because he rebukes them for corruption. Cato intends to enforce the law as long as he’s prætor and he’ll be venomously angry because Pompey has compelled him to release Helene.

“I have made one mistake after another, Orwic! I believe two-thirds of Pompey’s enmity this morning is accounted for by his having been told by the Vestals to procure Helene’s liberty. He can’t refuse. Their influence is much too artfully directed. They could turn all Rome against him. Probably he hates the thought of having to ask a favor of Cato, who will certainly hold out for terms. Cato can’t be bribed, but he’s a

politician, always looking for the lesser evil; he would compromise, but like an undefeated swordsman.

"Pompey—he's that big fly—half out of his wits with worry. A good soldier and a rotten politician, drunk with renown—no doubt wishing he had not encouraged Crassus to go to Asia, since now he must stand alone against Cæsar. More than likely Pompey is encouraging Cæsar to invade Britain, hoping he may meet defeat. Pompey has a notion that by keeping my men he can force some information out of me, and if I could guess what he wants to know I might out-maneuver him; otherwise he will have them killed in the arena. He loathes the mob, and despises butchery, but he knows his influence is waning, so he will do almost anything for popularity. Spectacles—spectacles—doles of corn—anything; they say his agents scour the earth for wild beasts for the arena. Zeuxis undoubtedly told him of the pearls I brought from Britain. Pompey thinks too highly of himself to try to steal them, but he wouldn't hesitate to let Cato take them in the name of the Roman law. He very likely traded you and me to Cato for Helene! Now do you see what an error I made? Do you begin to understand the danger?"

"Conops—nothing simpler than to catch Conops. Zeuxis has betrayed him. What then? My ship comes to Ostia and Sigurdson drops anchor in the Tiber-mouth. Pompey has authority to order out as many triremes as he wishes; there are always two or three available. They'll either blockade Sigurdson or force him to run if he's lucky. If they do blockade him, he will soon run short of food and water."

"Run for it!" said Orwic. "You must leave your men in Pompey's hands and hurry to Ostia."

"I will die first!" Tros answered, shaking the oaken table. "I expect my men to die for me. Shall I do less for them? Nay! What is duty for the man is obligation for the master! As the head rots, so the fish stinks! Orwic—"

Suddenly his amber eyes appeared to stare at an



horizon. Parted lips showed set teeth and his fingers gripped the table edge.

"No cause is lost while there remains a weapon and a man to use it! I might go to Cicero. He corresponds with Cæsar. He has influence, and he is Cato's friend; but Cicero is in Pompeii, which is far off, and they say he is worried with debts and doubt. If Zeuxis told the truth—he often tells it when it costs him nothing—Cicero is planning to defend Rabirius for Cæsar's sake; if he will plead that rascal's cause before the judges he should not balk at protecting us!"

"Make haste then. Let us go to Cicero," said Orwic.

"No. He is a lawyer. I dread the law's delay. Nor will I cool my heels at the temple of Castor and Pollux until some senator comes out from the committee room to find out whether I will bribe him heavily enough to make it worth his while to promise what he never will perform! Nor do I dare to return to Cato; Pompey will have told him I am Cæsar's man, and I was with him only yesterday attempting to persuade him to turn on Cæsar! He will think Cæsar sent me to tempt him, meaning to denounce him if he fell into the trap—intriguing against Roman arms!

"No. Cato has probably undertaken to condemn my men to the arena, and will do the same for you and me if we attract his notice! That is just the sort of trick that Pompey would turn on the honest old fool—persuade him that my men are criminals, encourage him to have them butchered; then, supposing that the men are really Cæsar's, letting Cæsar know Cato is to blame for it, thus aggravating, he will think, the hatred Cæsar has for Cato. Do you see it? Pompey would get credit from the mob for showing eight-and-thirty victims of a new sort in the amphitheater. Cato would get the blame. And Cæsar, so Pompey would think, by trying to avenge the insult, would drive Cato to join Pompey's party. Quite a number of important people might follow Cato when the crisis comes. Rome's politics are like hot quicksilver."

"You appear to me to know too much," said Orwic.

"In my own land I have found the politics bewildering, and they are simpler. How can you, who are not a Roman, pick the right thread and pursue it through the snarl?"

Tros paused.

"Men are born with certain qualities," he said, re-estimating Orwic—reappraising him; and there returned into his eyes that far-horizon look. "For instance, you were born with an ability to manage horses, which is something I could never do."

He mulled that over in his mind a minute. Then:

"Because I know ships and I understand the sea, it is a mean ship that will not sail faster under my hand than another's. Is it so with horses? Will a good horse, or a good team gallop for you faster than for me?"

"Undoubtedly," said Orwic. "What has that to do with it?"

"This—that I think the gods expect each of us to play his own part. There is a part that the Vestal Virgins play best, and there are other parts for you, and me, and for Helene—and even Zeuxis. It is not alone the great ones of the earth who—Let us leave this place! I saw a man who might be an informer hurry out and look too shrewdly at us as he passed the door."

He doffed his forehead-band and folded up his cloak, but even so he was too masterful a figure to escape the notice of the crowd. Men followed him and Orwic through the winding streets, accosting them in any fragment of a foreign tongue they knew. Thieves tried to rob them; half a dozen times Tros had to use his fist to save his cloak, until at last he struck one slippery Sicilian and sent him sprawling in the kennel. Instantly a cry went up that a barbarian had struck a Roman citizen! Three narrow lanes disgorged a swarm of loiterers whose life, endured in vermin-ridden tenements, was never raised out of its shabbiness except to see men slain splendidly in the arena. Rome's mob could rise as swiftly as the reeking dust, amuse itself a minute with a man's life, laugh, and disappear as casually as

the knackers of the slaughter-yards returning home to dinner.

Orwic drew his dagger and the two stood back-to-back, Tros making no haste to display his weapon; through the corner of his mouth he growled:

“Don’t stab unless you must! Stand firm, look gallant and expect some favor from the gods!”

Then:

“Citizens!” he roared, attempting to adopt the vulgar idiom that politicians used when cozening the crowd for votes. “One rattle of the dice yet! Hold!”

“Aye! Hold hard!” said a voice he recognized, and the Etruscan—he who was night-watchman for the goldsmith’s in the Forum—elbowed his way forward, grinning. The whole crowd knew him; he appeared to have authority of some kind; they obeyed the motion of his hand and half a dozen men leaned back against the swarm behind them, vehemently resisting the efforts of others to get to the front.

“Porsenna! Let us hear Porsenna!”

The Etruscan smiled with the familiar, ingratiating, confident good humor of a popular comedian, long used to waiting for the crowd to quiet down before he loosed his jests. But when the yelling had died down enough for one voice to be audible, he wasted no time on amusing them. He threatened.

“It will be a good show in the Circus Maximus, but perhaps you would rather riot now than get free tickets; I am on my way to get the tickets. What will Pompey’s secretary say, if I should have to tell him you have injured two of the best performers? How many tickets then for the people in my streets? Home with you!”

He gazed about him, memorizing faces, or pretending to, and if he had been a prætor he could hardly have received more prompt obedience. With jests, and here and there a grumble, they implored him to remember them and melted away up side-streets, not more than a dozen lingering in doorways to assuage their curiosity. Porsenna grinned at Tros.

"A good thing for you that the man who shares a bed with me is sick this morning! I had nowhere to sleep. And besides, it is true, this is the day I must distribute tickets. I get no pay for it, but people who want tickets have a way of keeping on the easy side of me, which makes life tolerable. We Etruscans love our bellies, and I assure you there isn't a house in all these streets where I can't get a good meal for the asking—that is to say, if they have anything, which isn't always. But there's always somewhere to turn for food or drink; I've noticed it never happens that they all starve on the same day. But have you found your men? No? Well, I'll find them for you. Only you must bear in mind I'm only a night-watchman and distributor of tickets, so you mustn't expect *me* to do more than show you where they are. I wouldn't have helped you just now if you hadn't given me a lot of money last night. You're a rich man and a stranger, and it always pays to go to a little trouble for folk who have generous tendencies. We Etruscans have a name for being sharp customers, but that's not true; we merely like the soft jobs and the good things and exert ourselves to get them. Let us come this way. Does it seem to you you owe me anything for that little service I did you just now?"

"Show me my men and I'll pay you handsomely," Tros answered.

The Etruscan led on through a maze of streets until they reached the valley below the Palatine, where an enormous wooden structure nearly filled the space between surrounding houses. The high walls were covered with electioneering notices in colored paint, and there was a constant pandemonium from cages, underground, where most of the wild animals were kept in darkness until needed for the public execution of Rome's criminals. There was a stench from an enormous heap of mixed manure that slaves were carrying away in baskets to be dumped outside the city, and the air was full of dust, besides, from heaps of rubbish being showered into carts.

There was a great gate at the end that faced the river Tiber, suitably adorned with horses' heads, weapons, shields and crudely fashioned lions, but the public entrances were all along both sides, and at the farther end were stables built of stone, beneath which were the cells in which most of the prisoners were kept who had been sentenced and awaited death in the arena. In the open space at the end there were spearmen, but not many and they did not seem to expect to be called upon for action, merely staring with indifference at Tros and Orwic as Porsenna led them toward a wooden office at the rear, where there was a small crowd of men, not one of whom seemed satisfied.

"They grumble, they grumble, they grumble!" Porsenna remarked. "But if there were enough tickets for every one in Rome, what profit would there be in being a distributor? Would anybody think it worth his while to curry favor with us? Some folk don't know an advantage when they see it. Watch them struggle for the allotments! Good sweat and excitement gone to waste! If there is one thing in all Rome that is honestly apportioned it's the circus tickets, region by region. There are so many for each important politician—so many for the giver of the games—and the rest are divided equally to us distributors. Now watch me."

He thrust two fingers in his mouth and whistled, then threw up his hand to catch the attention of a man at the office window. The man recognized him, nodded and tossed a bundle of tickets on to a shelf.

"There. That's the way to manage it. Now I can get mine when the crowding's over. All that costs me is two tickets; and since I'll know where they are I can do a favor to some one in one of my streets by telling him where he can buy them. Now come this way."

Farther to the rear, behind the stables, in between two rows of racing chariots that stood with poles upended, was a stone arch with a barred iron gate providing access to steps made of enormous blocks of stone that led down steeply into gloom. A fetid prison-smell came through the opening, and at a corner, where the



steps turned, there was one lamp flickering. A spearman, with a great key at his waist, stood by the gate and sullenly ignored the pleas of half-a-dozen women, one of whom, on her knees, had torn her clothing and was beating her naked breasts.

He recognized Porsenna instantly and drove his spear-butt at the woman to get her out of the way.

"No!" he said. "No! Get away from here! If you want to see your husband, get a permit from the prætor's office. Otherwise, get sentenced, too, to the arena; then they'll let you die with him! You wish to visit the dungeons?" he asked, grinning at Porsenna. "You and two friends? I would let *you* pass in free."

Tros took the hint and dropped two coins into Porsenna's palm, who cleverly hid one and gave the other to the spearman. The gate opened on oiled hinges and a wave of filthy air came through the opening as Tros and Orwic followed the Etruscan down the steps.

And now noise blended with the smell. Infernal mutterings suggestive of the restlessness of disembodied phantoms filled the atmosphere; the sound, the Stygian gloom and the disgusting stench were all one. On a stone floor in the midst of the great square columns that supported a low roof three men played at dice by candle-light and half a dozen others watched them. All wore daggers; there were spears beside them, leaned against the wall; each man had as well a heavy iron club with a short hook and a sharp spike at the end. The dice intensely interested them; they scarcely looked up—snapping fingers and adjuring Venus to reward them for the sacrifices they intended to bestow on her.

The murmuring came through heavy wooden doors, in each of which there was a bronze grille at about the level of a man's face from the floor. All the doors were made fast by bars that fitted into sockets in the oaken posts. There appeared to be a perfect maze of cells, with narrow, almost pitch-dark corridors between them; and at the far end of the vault there was another set of stairs, of solid masonry, that evidently led to the

arena or to some enclosure at one end of it. There was a charcoal brazier not far from where the men played dice and two clubs, similar to those the men had fastened to their wrists by thongs, were thrust into red-hot coal. A slave was blowing on it, and the red glow shone reflected in his face.

The slave spoke and one of the men removed a hot club from the fire, wrapping a wet cloth and then a leather guard around the handle. Two who had been watching the dice followed him. A fourth man lifted out a bar that locked a cell door, and the three went in, he who held the iron going last. The fourth man shut the door again, not locking it, and went back to the dice.

There was a great commotion in the cell—blows, oaths, scuffling, a screech—then one long yell of agony that seemed unending, as if the victim never drew a breath. The dice-players took no notice. When the yell died to a sobbing groan the three came out again and one of them tossed the hot club to the slave who watched the charcoal brazier. The fourth man left the dice and went and set the bar in place. It was his voice that made Tros's blood run cold; he recognized it instantly. It was Nepos!

"Did you injure him?" asked Nepos.

"Not much. Just burned his fingers enough to teach him not to try any more digging. That's the third time he's tried to escape."

Nepos returned to watch the dice. The men resembled phantoms in the gloom; the candle-light broke up the shadows, distorting forms and faces, but the voice of Nepos was unmistakable.

"Who comes?" he asked, shading his eyes as he glanced at the three who were standing with backs to the entrance-steps, a puzzling light behind them.

"Porsenna—and two visitors," said the Etruscan.

"Visitors? Have they a permit? Who—what have they come for?"

"This nobleman has lost his men. I tell him he will

find them here, though much good that will do him!"

"Who is he?"

Nepos approached. He appeared to be not the same man who had entertained Tros in his house. His ferocity, all on the surface now, had changed the very outline of his face—or so it seemed.

"Tros?" he said. "Tros of Samothrace? Who sent you here? That rascal Zeuxis?"

"I have come to find my men," Tros answered.

"Out! Get out of here!" said Nepos, flourishing his club at the Etruscan. Something in his tone of voice attracted the attention of the dice-players. They all came crowding behind Nepos.

"Well, I warned you I couldn't do more than show you where your men are," Porsenna remarked amiably. "You have heard him. He says I must go."

He turned toward the stairs. Tros, fingering his dagger, made as if to follow him but Nepos gestured to the others, who immediately cut off Tros's retreat and one man let Porsenna feel the point of his iron club as an inducement to go swiftly.

"You shall see your men," said Nepos. "Come."

He beckoned. If he was afraid of Tros he gave no sign of it although his keen eyes must have seen Tros's right hand at his dagger. Orwic drew his own short weapon and whispered to Tros excitedly:

"Don't follow him! Let's fight our way out!"

"No," said Tros, "let's find the Northmen."

He preferred to follow Nepos rather than be torn with iron hooks and clubbed. He took his hand off his dagger and touched Orwic's arm to reassure the younger man. Together they strode behind Nepos down a narrow corridor that stank of ordure and wet straw. There were cell doors right and left, and at the end, below a candle on a bracket, a peculiarly narrow opening protected by an iron grille—so narrow that if the grille were swung clear on its heavy hinges only one man at a time could possibly have passed.

"Do they know your voice?" asked Nepos over-shoulder, his voice rumbling along the tunnel.

"Sven! Jorgen! Skram! Olaf!" Tros shouted.

There was instant pandemonium. A deep-sea roar of voices burst out through the grille:

"Tros! Tros! Ho, master! Lord Tros! Come and rescue us!"

The prisoners in two score cells all added to the babel, clamoring for mercy; they supposed some great official had come looking for a lost retainer and on the spur of the moment every man invented reasons why he should be set free. Nepos struck his iron club against the grille and threatened to send for hot irons, but the Northmen did not understand him and their chorus roared louder than ever. An arm protruded through the grille and Nepos struck it, arousing a curse that sounded like a taut rope bursting suddenly.

"Silence!" Tros thundered, again and again, but not even his voice quieted them.

"Master, we sicken! We die, Lord Tros! Release us! Let us out!"

But it suddenly occurred to them that if he spoke they could not hear, and there was no sound then except their breathing as they crowded at the grille. Tros let his wrath loose:

"This is what I get for trusting you!" he growled in Gaulish. "Fine men! Follow the first lousy Greek who lies to you! Hopeless fools! Now I must buy you back like a job-lot of left-over slaves!"

He glanced at Nepos who was standing in between him and the grille.

"Whom should I speak to about freeing them?" he asked in Latin.

Nepos grinned sourly and turned a thumb down.

"They're due to die in the arena. If you like good advice, I'd say to you: leave Rome in a hurry!"

Tros held his breath. He thought of madness—of plunging his dagger into Nepos, loosing his Northmen and fighting the way out.

"It's too late to befriend them now," said Nepos. "This is the gate to the land of death."

Something in the tone of his voice reminded Tros

that Nepos was a man of strangely mixed peculiarities and loyalties.

"What I have, won't help," he said. "I have this *tessera*." He drew up a broken disk of engraved ivory that hung on a cord around his neck, beneath his shirt. It was approximately half of an ancient ornament, irregularly broken off, its ragged edge inclosed in a thin casing of gold to preserve it. "My father exchanged *tesserae* with Zeuxis' father—"

"Eh?" exclaimed Nepos. "What? Here, let me have a look at that. Has that Greek tricked me into sacrilege? If he and you are *hospites*—"

He gestured with his arm along the passage and pushed Tros in front of him.

"Go back there where it is lighter. I must know the truth of this."

They returned to the echoing half-light where the slave still blew at the brazier, the men with iron clubs retreating backward and then standing near to protect Nepos. But that grizzled veteran seemed totally indifferent to danger. He kept muttering—

"*Jupiter hospitalis!*"

Tros slipped off the cord over his neck and gave the *tessera* into his hand. Nepos pulled off with his teeth the gold band that protected the jagged edge and held the piece of ivory toward the candlelight.

"That might be genuine," he muttered. Then, sharp eyes on Tros: "Do you swear to me that Zeuxis has the other half of this?"

"Not I," Tros answered. "I am from Samothrace and therefore take no oath at random. But I swear to you—"

"By *Jupiter hospitalis*?"

"Aye, by *Jupiter hospitalis*, that my father and Zeuxis' father exchanged *tesserae*, of which that is the one I inherited."

"And has Zeuxis never given notice of repudiation?"

"Never. To the contrary, he welcomed me with such effusion that we never spoke of *tesserae* at all. There was no need. I arrived at his house without sending him



warning and he welcomed me with open arms."

"The Greek dog!" muttered Nepos. "Are the Greeks not bound by oath of hospitality? Great Jupiter! In Sulla's time a thousand Romans risked proscription for the sake of that oath! I myself—But are you sure the Greek knew? You say your father and his father exchanged *tesserae*, but did Zeuxis know of it?"

"He did. Nine years ago in Alexandria he claimed my father's hospitality, on board my father's ship, when Ptolemy's men were after him for having said too much to the wrong listener. My father hid him in the hold between barrels of onions, and that was where I first met Zeuxis. It was I who took food to him, lest the crew should learn his whereabouts and drop a hint to Ptolemy's men."

Nepos began breathing through his nose, his windy gray eyes glinting in the candle-light. He stood with clenched fists on his hips considering, not Tros apparently, but the atrocity that had been done to his own person.

"Even if the Greek was ignorant, the oath was binding until publicly annulled," he muttered.

"Zeuxis is a Roman citizen," said Tros.

"Aye, that he is! These Greeks who become Romans need a lesson. They accept Rome's credit and deny her claims! They grow rich and they—this is too much, Tros—"

He shook his finger under Tros's nose, as if Tros had been a party to the sacrilege.

"You, too, are an alien and may not understand Rome's principles. I tell you, I have seen men sent to this place, to be torn by animals, for crimes that were glorious deeds compared to this atrocity! I would prefer to see a Vestal Virgin immured living! An offense against *hospitium*!—If Cato knew of it—"

"Send word to him," said Tros.

"No. That would do you no good. Cato is—what is it he calls himself?—not a philosopher—a logician—that's it, a logician. He would order Zeuxis crucified, but he would not let your men go. He would say, let

each man die for his own offense."

"Offense?" said Tros. "I haven't heard of one. Who charged them? Who tried them? Who passed sentence?"

Nepos stared at him, incredulous. He appeared to think Tros bereft of his senses.

"Your men," he said, "were caught red-handed lurking in the portal of the Vestals. They are not entitled to a hearing. An offense against the Vestals is beyond the law's arm, even as they are above it. They may not be mentioned in a court of law. No law can touch them. They may not be haled as witnesses. How then shall a magistrate try such a case? Besides, your barbarians are not Roman citizens, nor subjects of any kingdom that Rome recognizes — are they? Pompey himself ordered the lot of them into the arena! My friend, they're your men no longer. They must die."

Nepos began drumming on his teeth with horny fingernails.

Tros spoke:

"Then I die with them. They *are* my men."

Nepos blinked at him. "You would make a splendid spectacle," he said. "Do you fight well?"

"It remains to be seen," Tros answered. "But they will fight better with me than without me."

"Have you broken *tesserae* together?"

"Nay, we broke bread. We have built and sailed a ship together."

"You should have been born a Roman," said Nepos. "Once in a hundred years or so we breed a few of your sort. Well, I can do you the favor. You may die with your men if you see fit. You shall go in there with weapons. I can arrange that."

"You will earn my good-will, Nepos."

"Well, I like that better than your ill will. It will suit me; I shall get the credit for a fine spectacle. And who knows? If you have the Vestals' favor you may be safe in the arena. They may turn their thumbs up when the time comes. I can send you against Glaucus.

He shall run you through the thigh. One can depend on Glaucus; many a time I have used him to preserve a man's life, but it never worked unless the Vestals had a hand in it."

He went on scratching at his chin. The wretches in the cells around him made noises like caged animals, all sounds uniting into one drab, melancholy moan. There was a conversation going on between cells in the polyglot thieves' jargon that creates itself wherever criminals are thrown together — droning, wholly without emphasis, resembling an echo of what happened last week. Its effect on Tros and Orwic was as if death clutched at them, but Nepos and his men seemed not to notice it — not even when a man in agony from their inflicted burns yelled imprecations.

"There is no place here to make you comfortable," Nepos said at last. "Are all oaths sacred to you?"

"Any of my making."

Nepos, scratching at his chin, nodded and nodded:

"Swear you will be here!"

"If my men are here, here I will be," Tros answered.

"And the barbarian?" He glanced at Orwic.

"He was the first against Cæsar's legions on the shore of Britain. Yes, I answer for him."

"Very well. Here, take your *tessera* and keep it. Trust me to deal with Zeuxis. There is no worse sin than violation of *hospitium*. You swear now — no trickery — you will be back here?"

"I agree," said Tros. "But what of my men? Can't you treat them better? They will sicken in that cage."

"Aye, they shall have good treatment. They shall be better fed. There is a shortage of strong barbarians to make a showing against the King of Numidia's black spearmen. They tell me your men fight with axes, which would immensely please the populace. As for Zeuxis —"

"If there's a law in Rome, my men shall go free yet!" Tros interrupted.

"Take my advice," said Nepos. "Let the law alone! If you apply to any magistrate he will inform himself

as to Pompey's wishes and then condemn them legally on any trumped-up charge. As it is, they are not condemned. If the Vestals should bid them go free none could quarrel with it, could they? or with me either."

"Money," said Tros, "would buy Rome. Tell me whom to see about it."

"Nay, nay, why buy promises that no one could keep even if he dreamed of doing it! Whom would you buy — Pompeius Magnus? Rich — proud — I suppose he bears you private enmity, but that is not my business. Whom else? The Vestals? You can't buy them. You might petition them. You will have to do that secretly and very craftily. As for Zeuxis — if that scoundrel isn't crucified within the month for sacrilege against *Jupiter hospitalis*, then my name isn't Nepos!"

But Tros's wits were working — furiously. It would not give him the slightest satisfaction to see Zeuxis crucified. Revenge on such a rascal was beneath his dignity. But if the man who had betrayed him could be made to undo the disaster at his own expense —

"Whatever Zeuxis did, I hold his *tessera*," said Tros, "and I am bound by oath to treat him as a *hospes* until he or I repudiate the bond before witnesses. And it is I who should accuse him, not you, Nepos. I prefer to give him opportunity to purge his sacrilege."

"Impossible!" said Nepos. "There is no way of condoning that offense. It is against God; it is against Rome; it is against citizenship. Zeuxis —"

"Is my *hospes*," Tros interrupted. "I implore you to refrain from interfering with him until I have my way first."

Nepos demurred: "If you were a Roman that might satisfy the gods, but you are not a Roman. *Jupiter hospitalis* looks to us Romans to uphold his dignity. However, I concede this — if you can find a way of punishing that scoundrel, do it. I will give

you time before I inform Cato and have him crucified. Meanwhile, no warning him! If he escapes, I will hold you answerable! He who overlooks such sacrileges as that knave has committed is as guilty as if he had done it himself! I will set informers on the watch to make sure Zeuxis does not escape to foreign parts."

"So do," Tros answered. "That will serve me. Let me speak to my men. Can you put them elsewhere? That dungeon they are in stinks like an opened grave."

"I will move them to the upper cells," said Nepos, "if you will guarantee their good behavior."

Tros strode back to the grille, where he was greeted by another chorus of lament.

"Silence!" he commanded. "Who shall have patience with faithless fools who run after the first Greek that lies to them? Dogs! I have had to beg a better cell for you; and now I go to buy you from whoever sells such trapped rats! Let me hear of one instance of misbehavior between now and then, and I will leave the lot of you to rot here! Do you understand that? You are to obey this honorable Nepos absolutely until I come, and if he tells me of one disobedience these walls shall be the last your eyes will ever see!"

He turned his back, indignant that he should have to speak so cruelly to decent men, then followed Nepos to the steps, and to the upper iron gate, and daylight — where the stable smell was like the breath of roses after the abominable feter of the dungeon.

As he walked off, he smiled wanly at the thought of how thoroughly cowed he had left his men, and for a moment he felt guilty of having been too harsh.



## Chapter XXVIII

### TROS FORMS AN ODYSSEYAN PLAN

*In a world so full of rubbish that even rich men's wastrels find amusement, the most worthless trash of all is revenge. Justice knows not vengeance, or it is not justice. But I see no unwisdom in putting a spiteful fool to work to spite himself into a net, if so be that should suit my purpose.*

From The Log of Tros of Samothrace

Tros made his way to Zeuxis' house in no haste, although Orwic was impatient. It was essential to take time to instruct Orwic thoroughly.

"Romans," he said, "have certain virtues, of which loyalty to certain customs is the greatest. They respect the Vestal Virgins and the law of hospitality. Whoever offends against those ancient institutions puts himself outside the pale and they regard him almost as no longer human. That is why Nepos turned on Zeuxis and befriended us. That is also why Pompey turned so suddenly against me. I have made one mistake after another, Orwic. If I had said nothing to the Vestals about Helene, Pompey very likely would have let my men go; more than likely one of his lieutenants seized them at Zeuxis' suggestion and Pompey knew nothing about it until afterward.

"It is not quite like Pompey to do such underhanded work. But then the Vestals told him not to interfere with me, and they also asked him to procure Helene's liberty. He jumped to the conclusion, I suppose, that Cæsar, the pontifex maximus, is trying to make use of the Vestals, and when I showed him Cæsar's seal that made him sure of it. No doubt he had already heard of Cæsar's swoop on Gades, which is in Pompey's province. He is beginning to feel

nervous about Cæsar. I ought to have known he would resent having the Vestals drawn into politics. He probably made up his mind to have you and me thrown into the arena along with my men, to teach the Vestals a lesson. If Cæsar cared to take that up, Pompey could make a public issue of it and accuse Cæsar of tampering with Rome's most sacred institution. Now do you understand?"

"No, I don't!" said Orwic.

"Very well, then leave it to a man who does! Observe whether we are being followed, and hold your tongue while I think!"

But thought comes wrapped up in obscurity when men are irritated, and whichever way Tros switched his speculation difficulties seemed insuperable. He supposed Conops would be in the dungeons presently and he would have no means of learning when his ship arrived at Ostia nor any way of warning Sigurdson to put to sea again and try some other port.

"There is nothing for it," he said finally, "but to try to use Helene's wits and Zeuxis' knavery! I have some money left, and fifty pearls, not counting the big ones I hid on the ship. Let us see what the gods can make of that material!"

"But what of me?" suggested Orwic. "I can out-ride any Roman! Get me a horse and let me find the way to Ostia. I can out-swim any Roman, too! Let me watch for the ship and swim out and warn Sigurdson."

Tros turned sarcastic:

"You who can speak neither Greek nor Latin! It would be easier for you to find one bug in a dunghill than Conops in Ostia! Nay, Orwic, we stand at death's gate. Let us gut death together, if we can't scheme a way out."

The lean, impertinent-eyed eunuch at the gate announced that Zeuxis was away from home.

"Then he will find me here when he returns," said Tros. "Admit me!"

"I have no such orders from my master," said the eunuch.

"Shall he find a dead slave at the gate?" Tros asked, his right hand on his dagger, so the eunuch changed his mood to an obsequious, sly suavity and Tros strode in.

And on the porch Helene greeted him, all laughter. She was dressed in pale blue silk from Alexandria, with roses in her hair and gilded sandals.

"I am washed clean—come and smell me! It took three women three hours to make me know there were no longer any vermin in my hair! Tros—Tros of Samothrace—"

"Have you seen Zeuxis?" he interrupted.

"Yes. He went to my house to take inventory and discover how much the public custodians stole—also to turn out the landlord's bailiffs. Zeuxis says it was you who betrayed me to Cato; but he pretends that he is sorry to hear that your men are in the *carceres*, and he also pretends to be worried about your fate. He proposes to restore my popularity by getting my Cappadocians entered in the *quadriga* race, but all the Thracian drivers who amount to anything are bought up—and besides, one can't trust them, because owners who have backed their chariots to win bribe even an honest man out of his senses."

She led into the courtyard by the fountain, where she lay luxuriously on a divan and ordered Zeuxis' slaves about as if she were the mistress of his household. Wine was brought.

"Already some of my friends talk of stabbing Cato in the Forum," she remarked. "They talk too loud, the hot-heads! I am here because I daren't go home for fear they may compromise me in some foolishness. I would rather have to love old Cato than be crucified for listening to plots against him! Drink to me, Tros of Samothrace! Drink to the light in my eyes—I am told it resembles starlight on the Nile!"

Tros gulped wine, coughing to disguise embarrassment, so nervous that he could not even make believe

to like her company. Her morals were no least concern of his; he knew his own strength. But he dreaded feminine intrigue as some men loathe the presence of a cat; it was indefinable but no less an obsession—almost superstition—probably heredity, due to his father's austere striving to prepare himself for the higher Samothracian Mysteries.

Helene studied him and laughed.

"Lord Tros," she said, "I like you better than the best in Rome! You challenge me! Are you a Stoic? I will wreck your stoicism! Come, drink to me—and smile a little while you do it—because I will certainly do you a great service. I perceive you are not to be won by being beaten, but by being helped to succeed."

"Pearls you shall have," Tros answered, and she nodded, her eyes smoldering.

"Beware of me!" she said. "I am a great gambler. I play fair. I risk all on a throw. I would wreck Rome for the sake of what my heart is set on—aye, Rome and Alexandria, Cæsar and Pompey—and you and me! Now craftily—here is Zeuxis!"

Naturally, Zeuxis was not taken by surprise; the eunuch at the gate had warned him. He affected to be pleased—ran forward to embrace Tros—let his jaw drop with an exclamation of astoundment when Tros held him off.

"I heard you had been seized. I have rushed here and there endeavoring to find friends who could help you. I—Tros, I—"

Tros drew out the *tessera* and held it under Zeuxis' nose.

"Now—no lies! Zeuxis, I can call eight witnesses to prove that your father and my father took oath of *hospitium*. There is Zenophon the banker for one, and there are doubtless temple priests who will remember it. If you have burned your *tessera* or lost it, that is no affair of mine. The oath holds—father to son, father to son—and you have broken faith. No lies, I said! Don't make the matter worse!"

"You never claimed *hospitium*," said Zeuxis, stammering.

"I had no need. The oath holds whether talked about or not. Two *hospites* have no need to repeat their obligations to each other, more especially when you, whose life my father saved for the oath's sake, received me open-handedly. You said your house was mine. You bade me enter and possess it. Should I then have pinned you, like a lawyer, to the details of your obligation?"

"Tros, what does this mean? I have done you no wrong," Zeuxis stammered, glancing at Helene, and his eyes were shrewdly speculative although fear blanched his cheeks.

Helene, dangerous for very love of danger and in love with Tros and with intrigue and with amusement, nodded, reassuring him. He jumped to the conclusion she was loyal to himself.

"I have done you no wrong," he repeated, meeting Tros's gaze. "Who has lied to you?"

Conceiving that Helene was his friend, he let his mind slip sidewise like mercury to another possibility, but Tros now understood the man he had to deal with and interpreted the changed look in his eyes.

"Neither poison nor dagger nor any other kind of treachery will help you any longer, Zeuxis. You have shot your bolt! Nor will it help to have me waylaid and returned into the prison, where my men lie at the risk of plague. Your infamy is known! If I die, that will not absolve you. Mark this—masticate it—let it become all your consciousness and govern you. You have but two alternatives, death or my mercy!"

"You threaten me?" Zeuxis stuttered. Fear had robbed him of his wits at last; he was trembling.

"Aye, Zeuxis! And a threat from me binds me as inescapably as any other promise! You are watched, so you can not escape abroad. The Roman who knows of your crime against *Jupiter hospitalis* itches to make an example of you, but I begged the chance for you to make amends. I have not yet repudiated my share of the vow, although you broke yours. I will still protect



you, if you turn about—now—smartly—and undo your sacrilege by helping me, as you have harmed me hitherto, with all your zeal and cunning! I will even lie for you in that event; I will deny that my misfortune was your doing.”

Zeuxis' face changed color. Pride, resentment, fear all fought for the control of him, but fear prevailed—fear and perhaps a grain of gratitude.

“Tros, you are very generous. It is true that I lost the *tessera* and it escaped my mind; but you exaggerate the wrong I did, which was an indiscretion, not deliberate treachery. I took a slave into my confidence, who went and sold your men to Licius Severus, Pompey's master-of-the-horse, and it was too late then for me to—”

“Lie me no more lies!” Tros interrupted. “You intended to divide my pearls with Licius Severus! I will make him party to the sacrilege and have your slave's testimony taken on the rack if there is any doubt in your mind as to my earnestness! I know the law. An offense against *hospitium* is treason against Rome; so your slaves can be tortured against you—and you also! But I blame myself a little, Zeuxis; I should not have tempted you by telling you of all those pearls—which are in a safe place now, where neither you nor any other rogue can get them.”

That last argument, like a knife that cuts two ways, instantly converted Zeuxis. Where the fear of punishment alone had undermined his will but left him infinitely capable of treachery, information that the pearls were out of reach removed all motive for infidelity. He wept and kneeling, clasping Tros's knees, begged him for forgiveness.

“Tros—honored *hospes*—I am dying of the shame this day has brought on me! Accept my—”

But Helene knew no sentimental qualms, nor had the slightest patience with them.

“Tros!” she exclaimed, rising. “What have you done with the pearls?”

She poised a wine-cup as if taking aim. She pointed

one hand at Tros's eyes. Her own eyes glared. "Are you a pauper? Is your wealth gone?" She was much more beautiful in that guise than when trying to seduce. Beautiful—unlovely! Artificiality was stripped off. Her nature was more naked than her body had been when she fought the gladiator. She was a human cobra—honestly venomous—openly baffled and angry and revengeful.

"Tros!" she said. "Have you deceived me?"

"Aye," he answered. "It appears I made you think I fear you!"

He seized her wrist. She sprang at him, but he jerked her arm and twisted it behind her back until she bit her lips in agony—then lifted her by arm and leg and threw her sprawling in a corner, where she caught the curtain to break her fall and tore it from its rod.

"Bring me a whip!" he commanded. "Swiftly, Zeuxis! Did you hear me say a whip? This slave shall learn—"

But there was no need for the whip. The word "slave" whipped her better than the strongest arm could have. She was a slave pretending to be free. No doubt the hold that Cæsar, or more likely Cæsar's secret agent, had over her was just that fact, that she was slave-born. In an instant she could be thrown down from whatever pinnacle she might attain. Society protected itself ruthlessly against its victims. The slave found taking liberties with freedom could be sure of nothing less than scourging—would be lucky if not crucified—lashed to a gibbet, that is, and mocked by other slaves as death came slowly of thirst and flies and gangrene.

Helene groveled. She was too much of an artist in emotion to waste blandishments on Tros in that mood, and her slave-birth carried with it, as almost always, the peculiar slave-consciousness that crisis could bring to the surface, however deeply it was buried or however artfully concealed. The free man's scorn of slaves was not totally unjustified; tradition of the centuries, heredity, education, had instilled into the slave-born a

subconsciousness of slavish spirit that mere manumission rarely overcame. It was not without inherent justice that the slave set free was still the former master's client and in many ways still bound to him, as well as denied many of the rights pertaining to a free-born citizen. Society had bred the slave and brutalized him, but it understood the problem. The slavewars that had nearly ruined Rome had served to unite all free and freed men into one close corporation, ready to endure extremities of any kind in preference to imposition by its subject human beings. If discovered, it would not have helped Helene that her owner was of high estate and her abettor in the crime against society; not even Cæsar could have saved her then.

She laid her hands on Tros's feet, abject in submission on the floor in front of him. Her silence was a stronger plea than any words she might have spoken; she was pleading not alone for Tros's silence but for his protection, too, from Zeuxis who had heard the word "slave," who understood, and was incapable of not exploiting the discovery unless Tros should prevent.

"Get up!" Tros ordered. She obeyed, with all the cobra-venom gone—a piece of merchandise, worth nothing if denounced. Not Pompey, with his power to impose his will on four-fifths of the senate, could have saved her if the truth were known. For the moment she was too submissive to imagine the alternative that she had threatened through the grating of the prætor's cell; she did not feel sufficiently her own to kill herself.

That mood, Tros understood, would not last long. Her elasticity would set her scheming presently. Unless he guided the reaction she would turn more desperately dangerous than she had been. He supplied the necessary ray of hope:

"I go to Cæsar soon," he said. "I have obtained a lien on Cæsar's influence. Obey me wholly—without flinching—and I will not only give you the pearls I promised, but I will also demand that Cæsar shall manumit you."

"Cæsar doesn't own me," she said dismally. "I am only rented to him by Rabirius."

"Good. Cæsar shall instruct Rabirius, who is in fear of an impeachment and will bid high for Cæsar's influence with the judges. Meanwhile—" he turned on Zeuxis—"Silence! Spare that woman as I spare you! As the gods are all about us, I will ruin you if you betray her!" Then he swung around again and faced Helene. "Fail me in one batting of an eyelid and you shall see what happens to the slave caught posing as a free-born woman!"

He began to pace the floor as if it were his own poop, striding the length of the room and back again, to judge, under lowered eyelids, when he turned, the speed and the extent of Zeuxis' and Helene's recovery—intending they should not recover too far before he yoked them, as it were, and set them working. He had handled far too many mutinies at sea to let much time lapse between victory and imposition of a task.

"My men lie rotting in the dungeons," he said suddenly. "My ship makes Ostia, and my man Conops very likely has been picked up by the prætor's men or by some of Pompey's followers. I need help. Where shall I find it?"

"I have influence with Nepos," Zeuxis began, and paused. The smile on Tros's face was sardonic; there was something enigmatic in the way he stood with folded arms. "Nepos might—"

"Let us talk about to-day, not yesterday!" said Tros, "and of what you will do, not what Nepos might do. What is this about the races and the team of Cappadocians? Are you so situated you can enter that team?"

"Easily," said Zeuxis.

"In Helene's name?"

"Yes, under red or white, but she has no charioteer except the Sicilian who keeps the horses exercised—a freed man—a good trainer, but sure to lose his head when an opponent crowds him to the *spina*\* and the

\*Spina: The structure down the midst of the arena, at the ends of which the racing chariots had to turn.

spectators begin yelling. He would also certainly be bribed to lose the race."

"What if a charioteer is found?" Tros asked.

"Who knows? If I knew the man I would bet on the Cappadocians. Otherwise I would bet just as heavily against them."

"Here is the man," said Tros. He laid a hand on Orwic's shoulder. "This is the best horseman from a land where chariot driving is the measure of a man's worth. I have seen Prince Orwic drive unbroken horses. He has magic in his hands, or in his voice, or else he owns an extra sense akin to seamanship, that says 'yes' and can make the horses say it when the gods themselves appear to say 'no'! Let him see those Cappadocians, and rig them in a chariot, and feel their helm a time or two. Let him con the course and memorize the landmarks. Then there is utterly no doubt who wins, if those four Cappadocians can run!"

It took an hour to stir enthusiasm. Zeuxis and Helene were both crushed; he had to coax them back to confidence. Zeuxis could think of a thousand doubts as to the value of the plan, and of its outcome even if successful. It was all discussed in front of Orwic, who did not understand one word of it.

"Most charioteers are slaves," said Zeuxis. "Some are freed men, and the rest are of the type of gladiators — that is to say, regarded with contempt. But your friend Orwic is a prince. What will he say when he learns that the mob, which roars itself hoarse for the winner and heaps flowers on him, nevertheless thinks a charioteer no better than a gladiator—meaner, that is, than itself?"

"Who cares what a mob thinks? No task can lower a man," Tros answered. "It is men who lower their profession. If the Lord Orwic were an upstart or a mere inheritor of titles he might flinch from such a stigma, but I brought no flinchers when I picked my crew! If he had thought whatever he might do for Britain possibly could be beneath his dignity, believe me, he would be in Britain now, not sharing my adventures! Orwic!" he said suddenly, "how long is it



since you made sacrifice to any god whatever?"

Orwic rose out of a chair and yawned, then shrugged his shoulders.

"Long enough for all the gods to have forgotten me," he answered.

"Are you willing to make sacrifice?"

"Aye, to your necessity. Some gain might come of that. But you have taught me not to whimper to the gods. I do nothing by halves, Tros. I have come to expect the gods to serve me, not I them."

"They will serve you best clean-shaven," Tros observed, "because the prætor's men are very likely looking for a prince with a moustache! The gods might prefer the Gaulish costume to the Roman, when the prætor's men are very likely looking for a Briton in a Roman tunic! It is easiest to coax the gods by doing what one does best."

"I can hunt, ride, fight and drive a chariot," said Orwic, "nothing else. I am one of those unfortunates born out of time—as useless as a pig's tail. Two or three hundred years ago I might have amounted to something."

"Go and let Zeuxis' barber shave you. We will see what you can do," said Tros. Then to Helene, "Go and give your thanks to Pompey. Overwhelm him with your gratitude for having freed you from the prætor, and beg leave to reward him for his generosity by entering your Cappadocians in his name, to be driven by a Gaulish charioteer named—named—let us see, Ignotus."

## Chapter XXIX

### IGNOTUS

*I was born among wisemen. My father was a Prince of Wisdom. In Alexandria I attended the schools of philosophy, by nature nonetheless observant of the uses to which wisdom may be put, and never fond of*

*thinking without doing. Unused wisdom is a vinegary wine that rots its barrel. There is no end of wisdom, but a swift end for him who forgets that wisdom flows, it is not stagnant. Speaking for myself, I have never found a set of circumstances that a little wisdom could not remedy. But wisdom is not in book or bag. It is a stream, and down-stream it is foul with yesterday's mistakes. Let a man look toward its source, and dip thence; he shall not lack inspiration.*

From The Log of Tros of Samothrace

The Circus Maximus reëchoed to the shouts of charioteers schooling their teams at the turns, and to the hum of the voices of extravagantly well-dressed loungers gathered in groups near the gate where the chariots entered, or sprawling on the seats reserved for *equites*, to watch the practice gallops and lay bets or learn the latest rumors about who had bribed which charioteer.

There was a new bay-colored team of Cappadocians yoked to a chariot embossed with Pompey's monogram and driven by a young, athletic looking man in Gaulish costume who drove them at a walk around the course so many times that the observers presently lost interest. Then, suddenly, he launched the team into a frenzied gallop, reining in again before he reached the turn.

"Did you see that? All four on their toes at once—as sudden as a javelin! That man will bear watching!" said a dissolute-faced youngster, leaning on his elbows over the barrier near the box reserved for patrons of the games.

"Better watch Helene," his companion suggested. "That is her team. The charioteer is probably her slave, and she's as crooked as Rabirius, who is said to have adopted her in Alexandria because she knew too much about his goings on! Have you heard the latest? Cato had her arrested, and Pompey interfered! Some say Pompey did it to oblige Rabirius as a desperate effort to keep on friendly terms with Cæsar. And by the way, there's news this morning: Cæsar has invaded Britain. Cæsar's agent is backing Rabirius, whom Cato wants

to prosecute for extortion in Alexandria; and now everybody is wondering what concessions Pompey had to make to Cato to get Helene out of his clutches."

"Oh, didn't you hear?" said the other, with the air of a man who always knew the news. "My steward was told by the barber who shaves Cato's secretary, that Pompey had to agree to leave Nepos in charge of the dungeons. There was talk, you know, of one of Pompey's veterans getting that job. They say Julia has sentimental prejudices and wanted a venial rascal in there who would substitute a corpse for any prisoner whom she thought unjustly condemned. But the doctor who physics Lavinia's slaves was told by one of Pompey's doctors's slaves that Julia is dying, so I daresay Pompey didn't think it worthwhile arguing. Old Cato is a Roman if there ever was one."

"Nonesense! He's a bundle of old-fashioned prejudices, with as much sense as a last year's statue on a dust-heap!"\*

"Never mind. He enforces the law. When a criminal has been condemned he dies in the arena. No more slaves or substitutes while Nepos is in charge and Cato shuffles off to the slums to talk with him half the night! I have old-fashioned notions. I rather admire Cato, although I admit, I would not like to entertain him in my house; he would probably arrive bare-footed, bring in the lictor with him, and discuss morality. Watch that team now!"

The Cappadocians at last were being sent around the course at full speed, he who drove them displaying none of the histrionics generally practised by charioteers to excite the crowd. He did not shake the reins or shout; he did not fan the horses with his whip; he stood as rigidly erect as possible, allowing for knees

\*It was no unusual thing to make space in the Forum by removing the statues of forgotten politicians. These were either thrown away or re-chiseled to represent a more recent political favorite.

bent to absorb motion as the chariot bumped behind the stretched out team; but any judge of speed—and there were scores of them looking on—knew instantly that this was faster than any chariot had moved that morning. There was magic in the driver's hands, that loosed four horses in one spasm, as it were, of concentrated force.

"Who is he? Look at that! *Jupiter omnipo*—"

There were ten teams practising. Most of the charioteers were taking short spurts at the turns to teach their horses how to cut in when another chariot was forced outward by its own momentum at the curve. As Orwic whirled at top speed around the far end of the *spina* two other charioteers deliberately swung into his path, pretending not to see him!

"Gemini!"

He dodged between them as a hare slips in between the hounds, made time to lash one charioteer across the face with the butt end of his whip and, striking the other's wheel with his own hub, spilled him, hardly seeming to have lost speed, turning to laugh at the man sprawling among struggling horses.

"That's the team I bet on! The man knows his business! Mark you—that was no accident. Those are slow teams turned out purposely to injure him. Some one with a big bet is afraid of him. He shall carry my money."

"Aye—to Hades, if you're such an idiot! If they think he stands a chance of winning—the better he is, the worse for him! If they can't wreck him in the practice gallops he'll be dead before the day comes, or else some one will poison his horses or saw through the chariot axle! When did a man ever win who wasn't so well known that nobody dared to play foul? Probably Helene is in need of money, in which case the exhibition is simply an invitation to bribe her to withdraw the team or else to guarantee to lose the race!"

Meanwhile, Tros was wasting no time watching Orwic, who, well warned, was living with the horses day and night with two hired Gaulish gladiators to

protect him. Though Helene had entered the team under Pompey's name, that was in some ways a disadvantage, because Pompey himself had returned to his villa to be with his ailing wife and had left all arrangements for the coming games in the hands of one of his lieutenants. There were fourteen races to be run before the third day of the games, when butchery of prisoners and combats between gladiators would begin, so Pompey's worried manager was best not approached; if asked to protect Helene's charioteer he would probably have done exactly the opposite, to avoid the risk of losing friendships among influential *equites*, who would object to losing money through an unknown charioteer's surprise victory. There was as much corruption in the races as in politics, and there was also jealousy from Pompey's own great racing stable to consider.

But Tros had to depend not only on Orwic's victory, but on the acclamations of the crowd. He had to make Orwic popular, while he himself kept out of sight for fear of being recognized by any one who might report him to the prætor. Nepos had refused to intervene with Cato, saying he could not afford to lose the prætor's friendship; more, when Tros went to him with fruit and vegetables for his men, he said: "Are you a turn-coat after all that bold boast? Get away from Rome then, now, before it's too late. Your men must tread the sand unless orders come from Cato or the senate. You have three more days, so stir yourself! I have told Cato you are in the *carceres*—which is near enough to the truth; I hold your promise. Cato says you have been plotting against Rome, besides intriguing with the Vestals. If Cato catches you, he'll only send you to me. There's nothing I can do, unless you want yourself run through the thigh. You might appeal then to the Vestals. They might dare to protect you; but if they should look away I would have to order



out the masks\* and hooks. I would prefer to fight it out if I were you."

So Tros kept Zeuxis and Helene hard at work manipulating Rome's news-avid underworlds. They sent their slaves into the city to inform whoever had a ticket for the games that it was safe to bet on Helene's Cappadocians and the charioteer Ignotus. Rumor having spread that Cæsar had already attacked Britain, advantage was taken of that to excite superstition. It was whispered, as a deadly secret — which naturally spread like wild-fire — that Ignotus was a Gaul and had been sent by Cæsar to foreshadow his own success in Britain by winning a victor's laurel in the Circus Maximus.

The mob loved Cæsar and his everlasting triumph over foreigners, whose property poured into Rome, so there were only enough doubters to keep the odds against Helene's Cappadocians comparatively tempting. The Jews, Greeks and Armenians, who openly conducted lawless betting dens under the eyes of bribed officials, did a thriving business.

Three of Zeuxis' slaves were sent to Ostia to try to find out what had become of Conops, failing which they were to watch for Tros's ship and send word by runner. But the first message they sent back was to the effect that Conops had vanished as if earth had swallowed him and that there was no sign of the ship, although two triremes, with full crews on board, were anchored near the harbor-mouth and seemed to be expecting action.

Tros made one desperate effort to reach the Vestals and appeal for their protection. But Pompey had begun to pave the way for a public protest against the Vestals' alleged intriguing in behalf of Cæsar. Their palace was heavily guarded. Even when the Vestals went to change the watch over the undying flame

\* The men in masks came out to kill the wounded before other men put hooks under their armpits and dragged them out.

they walked between two lines of armed men, who turned their backs toward them and faced the other way. Tros did not dare to draw attention to himself.

So he had to pin his whole faith to the wildest plan ever a desperate man invented! Orwic *must* be the victor in the last *quadriga* race on the third day, when the crowd would already be mad with excitement. Orwic *must* win money for the crowd as well as foretell Caesar's coming triumph. That was something that the gods and Orwic must contrive between them. Then, the races over, Orwic must join Tros in the *carceres* and sally forth the next day into the arena, while the crowd still loved him, and so make Tros and his Northmen popular. Whether they should have to fight Numidians or beasts, Orwic must appear to be the leader; Tros himself would simply guard the young man's back and rally the Northmen when they needed it. Then, when the foes were beaten — as they *must* be! — Tros, acting as interpreter for Orwic, would appeal to the spectators — to the Vestals — even to Pompey himself as the patron of the games! The odds were half a million to one against the plan's success — and yet no other plan was possible.

There was nothing to count on but the mob's emotion, absolutely unpredictable, although the Roman mob was sometimes generous toward prisoners who showed good sport. The Vestals, if the mob were not enthusiastic, might not dare to give the signal to let Tros and his companions go free. Possibly Pompey had conveyed a hint to them. But if they did dare, nobody would question the decision afterward — not even Pompey himself.

And meanwhile, not a sign from Conops — not a hint of where the ship might be. She might be wrecked. Or Sigurdson might have flinched from the risk of putting into Ostia and, turning pirate, might have set forth on a mad cruise of his own. And Cæsar already invading Britain. Probably Cæsar was short of men because of the lack of shipping and the dire necessity to hold Gaul with numberless garrisons all ready for

emergency. But even now Caswallon and his Britons might be fighting desperately for their Lunden Town. He could almost hear Fflur saying:

"Tros will defeat Cæsar. Never doubt him!"

And last, not least, Helene added to the climax of perplexities. When he told her his plan and she understood he had nothing to depend on but the very doubtful generosity of the spectators, she recovered self-possession. The cobra-venom in her took a new lease of existence.

"Tros," she said, "Lord Tros, you are no judge of women, but to judge men shrewdly is my one gift. I find you admirable. You can thrill me as no man ever did, and you can make me flinch without a blow, which is a rapturous sensation now I come to think of it. And I adore a man who is so faithful that the very Roman headsman trusts him! Nevertheless, I think you are the least wise man I ever saw!"

"Rot me your opinion!" Tros exploded. "Save your own skin by obedience."

"Lord Tros," she answered, smiling, "I believe I know a better way than all this trusting to your gods, and to the crowd. I don't believe in any gods, not having seen them, but I know the Romans; I have seen them sobbing at the death of elephants and howling in the next breath for the death-blow to a brave man, simply for the lust to see a man die! A good gamble is exciting, and the game has most zest when the stakes are highest. But why give too long odds, when there is a better chance, and more to win, in an equally exciting game?"

"What treachery do you brew now?" Tros wondered, staring at her.

"None. Tros, I love you! I would rather die with you in the arena than betray you or see you lose.

"Tros," and there was anger in her eyes now, "do not doubt me. I will gamble with you to the end, and I will do my utmost to prepare the crowd to set you free by acclamation. But remember — if you go free,

that will be in part my doing. I will have a claim on you."

"True. I will remember it," said Tros. "Pearls you shall have, and your freedom when I reach Cæsar."

"If you leave Rome, I come too!" she retorted. "Do you think my heart is anything to trifle with? And it easier to shake off war's scars than —"

She perceived she had not even penetrated through his thoughts of fifty other matters that obsessed him.

"Conops," he said, looking absent-minded, "may have fallen foul of drink and women. He is a faithful little rascal, but the wine-shops on the harbor-front of Ostia —"

Helene laughed — abruptly — bitterly. "Tros do you think I am not worth more to you than any longshore sailor?"

"Deep-sea sailor," he corrected.

She ignored the interruption.

"I have said, I love you. I have never loved until I saw you — never!"

"*Tchutt!* That reminds me," said Tros, "I must take care of Zeuxis."

"It is I not Zeuxis who will cause the crowd to free you," she retorted. "I am spending all my money. I am even begging the favor of Lucius Petronius — that dog — if he will use his influence among the *equites*. And do you think I will let you leave me to Petronius? You shall take me with you, or you shall never leave Italy!"

But Tros was thinking of Caswallon and the Trinobantes, probably retreating before Cæsar's doggedly advancing legions. He could almost see Caswallon's kind face and the eyes of Fflur. Almost he could hear Fflur speak:

"The Lord Tros will never desert us. Somehow he will find a way to worry Cæsar's rear. Tros never would forget a friendship."

Slowly the far-away look in his eyes relaxed, and the frown melted. As he threw off that mood, he laid his hand abruptly on Helene's shoulder — not particu-

larly gently, noticing the strength of her young muscles, smiling at the thought that she should waste affection on him.

"Woman," he said cheerfully, "if you prefer to ruin me, arrange for me to die in the arena! Now I go to give my men encouragement. If you love me, as you say, then watch for my man Conops. If he comes contrive to let him reach me. And one other thing—attend to it that Zeuxis sends into the *carceres* those weapons that my men left in bundles in his charge."

"I am yours," she answered. "I will serve you. But remember—I am yours as much as any of your men and you shall not desert me! Tros, I have warned you! Did you hear me? Did you understand?"

## *Chapter XXX*

### *CONOPS*

*In Alexandria there are slaves who teach philosophy, and they are good teachers. From a slave I learned the trick of calculus by which I built the ship I visioned, whereas all he saw was calculus. It is true, I have found my freedom is slavery to the daily need to enlarge it, lest it grow less and ensnare me into love of thinking but not doing. But I find my slavery is less humiliating than that other.*

*Nevertheless, there are men whose virtue lacks direction. Such men need a master, to whom they yield obedience in exchange for stanch exaction of the best they can do. Not being God, I know not why this is, but I observe it. I myself would willingly obey a man who could exact from me more than I give to the men who obey my commands.*

From The Log of Tros of Samothrace

In cellars, dens and storerooms under the tiers of wooden seats, in the dungeons, and in the big, stone-walled enclosures at either end of the Circus Maximus



pandemonium reigned for many days before a public spectacle. In nothing had the Romans carried organization to such a pitch as in the management of public games, so discipline prevailed in spite of frantic haste and privileged interference. The actual control was in the hands of the experts, many of whom were foreigners, and each of whom knew the last detail of his own particular responsibility.

The giver of the games — he who paid the bill — was only nominally in authority; he left all details to subordinates, of whom the greater number were, like Nepos, permanently employed by the city and responsible to elected officials. They resented the officious interference of the patron's own men, whose ambition naturally was to produce a spectacle more magnificent and thrilling than any one that had preceded it, the whole purpose of the spectacle — originally a religious rite — being to increase the patron's fame.

Pompey lacked — and his lieutenants knew he lacked — a true grip on the popular imagination. His tastes were literary and artistic. He loathed the brutal exhibitions that had become the crowd's first test of man's fitness to hold public office. Although his agents scoured the earth for animals and gladiators, though his school of gladiators was the best in Rome, and though his racing-stable was superbly managed, beyond ordering his treasurer to pay the bills he gave scant personal attention to any of those interests, preferring his country estate and his library, both lavishly adorned with plunder that he brought home from his conquests in the East.

Pompey was a man whose natural ability was undermined by vanity and by contempt for details. It pleased him to believe that, in his own phrase, he could stamp his foot and raise an army — to accomplish any purpose. Temperamentally he was lazy, vain and opportunist; politically he was autocratic but averse to civil violence except in so far as it was necessary to enforce his own convenience; his own lieutenants were as arrogant and violent as any men in

Rome, but he upheld them. Theoretically he was opposed to looting, but he had enriched himself by that means; in speech and writing he condemned corruption, but his own front garden at election time was set with tables, at which his corps of secretaries handed out the money for the votes. His magnanimity was frequently spectacular and very often genuine, particularly if it ministered to pride; but he could shut his eyes to things he did not want to know, with almost ox-like indifference — in which respect he was so far inferior to Cæsar that there was no comparing the two, politically. Cæsar ignored nothing. Pompey, equally an opportunist, blazed out of retirement, exercised his genius until he wearied of it, and withdrew again.

Naturally, his character had bred a corresponding attitude of mind in his lieutenants, who irritated Cæsar at every opportunity and looked to Pompey to control the consequences. It was well known, even to outsiders, that the only bond of peace between the two men was the fact that Cæsar's daughter Julia was Pompey's wife and that Pompey was extremely fond of her. Cæsar depended on Julia to preserve at least the outward appearance of friendship, although it was a moot question whether she deliberately fed Cæsar's ambition or was simply eager to contrive peace.

Now, although the doctors held out hopes of Julia's recovery, they only deceived Pompey who, as usual, believed what it pleased him to believe and shut his eyes to an alternative. None who had seen her recently had any doubt that Julia was dying; and none doubted that when Julia was dead the open breach with Cæsar must inevitably follow. Pompey's closest friends, in fact, were eager for the issue; it was clear to them that Cæsar's influence was gaining and delay increased his chances of success. The time to split the breach wide open was while Cæsar's hands were full in Gaul and Britain.

So the men who took over the Circus Maximus in

Pompey's interest determined that the crowd should recognize him as the greatest entertainer who had ever squandered his munificence on Rome. They would make Cæsar's entertainments, recklessly extravagant though these were, fade from the public memory. They nearly drove the staff of regular attendants mad with their interference and Nepos, for instance, cursed the very name of Pompey. The dens and cages under the high tiers of seats, and the cellars below those, were so packed with roaring animals, and the stench from them was so atrocious, that it was even doubted whether horses would be manageable during the three days chariot-racing that were to precede the slaughter.

The dungeons were so thronged that no excuse was needed for confining Tros's men to wooded cells above the level of the ground. Nepos even used the Northmen to help spread the loads of coarse sand brought in by countless carts from the sandpits near Via Appia and many another prisoner toiled in fetters, hoping that good-will might cause him to be spared some last indignity. The risk of fire was so great that the whole of Crassus' fire-brigade and all the sailormen ashore in Ostia were summoned to stand watch, with the result that two whole crowded streets of Rome were gutted by the fires which raged with no one to extinguish them. All Rome talked of nothing but the coming games.

Nepos, who never went home now but spent day and night attending to his prisoners and rearranging groups for this and that atrocious butchery, made quite a confidant of Tros, invited him to share his hurried meals and grumbled to him about every countermanded order and new interference with his plans.

"Why can't they leave it to men who have done this kind of thing all their lives? Take your men, for instance. First, I was to send them in to fight Numidians. That would have been good; but, some fool thought it would be better to send them against

Roman gladiators, who would finish them off and then slaughter the blacks — which would have been a sort of compliment to the ever-victorious Roman legions.

“Well, that wouldn’t have been so bad, although it would have cost like Cannæ in expensive gladiators. But some other idiot remembered your men are criminals and not entitled to a fair chance. One man said I shouldn’t give them weapons. I had Hercules’ own labor to convince that stupid fool — he’s one of Pompey’s favorites and probably the man who agreed with Zeuxis to put you in trouble for sake of your pearls — Did you have pearls? Did the wrong man get them from you? This job looks to me like spite.”

“I have fifty, and a little money,” Tros said, looking keenly at him.

“Well, you can’t buy me! If you get out of this you will need all — but I don’t believe that’s possible. If it’s a case of masks and hooks that cloak of yours shall hang on my wall. I will keep an eye on the men who drag you to the *spoliarium*. That fool argued that you and your men are criminals and should be torn by beasts; he tried to bribe me to have you trapped somehow and used on the bulls that Cæsar sent here recently. When he sees you in the arena he’ll be surprised. He’ll expect me to claim that bribe. Maybe I will! Luckily for you Cæsar’s agents wouldn’t let us have the bulls; Cæsar expects to use them for his own show later on. I insisted you’re not regular criminals, not having been committed by a judge, and somebody might hold me liable if I should send you in unable to protect yourselves. Then they thought of a new notion — not a bad one either. Your men are to have the weapons they’re used to and fight lions; then Numidians; then, if they survive that, Roman gladiators. And now listen; I’m an old hand at this business. Since you’re going in with them they’ll have a leader, and that makes a big difference.

“The longer you last the better the crowd will like you, unless they suspect you of stalling. On the

other hand, you'll have to use caution. If you're too cautious the overseers will order out the whips and hot irons to inspire you. You must take a very careful middle course. If you overcome the Numidians too easily the populace will lust to see the tables turned on you and you'll get no mercy when the gladiators lay you on the sand. But if you lose a few men to the lions, and some more to the Numidians, and then fight well against the gladiators, they'll take pity on you from the benches. What do you say? Shall I promise a few pearls to Glaucus — he fights with sword and buckler and has never been touched once — he's in his prime — unbeatable. For half a dozen pearls he would run you through the thigh. And Glaucus is a decent fellow — good-natured — gallant — knows how to throw an attitude, and smile, with his foot on a man's body, that persuades the crowd to spare his victim nearly every time."

Tros nodded.

"Mind you, I can't guarantee the populace," said Nepos. "But if your man, Orwic, wins his race, and joins you, and plays leader against beasts and men; and if you fight capably, I think they will wave their handkerchiefs. If the applause is loud enough the Vestals are almost sure to add their verdict, and wheather they order you released or not I can pretend I understood that. I should say you have a fifty to one chance, which is more than most men have who go in under my auspices!"

Tros thanked him.

"Don't offer me money!" said Nepos. "I'm old and don't need it. I'm devoted to justice, like Cato. I like to see the enemies of Rome die, but I prefer to give an honest man a chance. And by the way, remember about the lions. They'll be half-starved, two to every one of you, and each will get a touch of hot iron as he comes out of the trap. Nine men out of ten get killed by striking at them too soon. Coax them, if you can, to spring. Then duck — don't spring aside — and rip them up from under. The worst are those that



don't spring but lurk and then come running at you. Then what you chiefly need is luck, but the best plan is to run at them — meet them midway; sometimes then they flinch. Flinching costs life, man or beast; and mark you — never try to avoid them! Meet them head on. They can claw you sidewise quicker than a knife-stab."

Tros went to instruct his men and met less trouble than he feared. It thrilled the Northmen that their leader had preferred to share their fate, though they had walked into a trap like fools. Their own tradition, that a death in battle was a passport to the halls of everlasting revelry, was no half-hearted superstition; they regarded life as an exordium to death. They would have gloomed if left alone; with Tros to lead them they were jubilant.

Tros borrowed a harp and set the *skald* to singing legends of Valhalla, until the Northmen roared the old familiar refrains and even the homesick Britons joined in, experts at a tune, although the vowel-sounds they made instead of words were meaningless. So Nepos sent them wine, because their chanting cheered the other prisoners and it was half his battle to get men into the arena looking like men and not carcasses already three parts dead. The hot iron and whip could work a semblance of rebellious indifference, but song, so rarely heard within those walls, made men again of tortured riff-raff, who were lucky — as Nepos tactfully assured them — not to have been crucified at crossroads with their entrails showing through the wounds made by the scourge.

There was wine for all the prisoners the last three nights, because Tros persuaded Nepos to permit it and himself defrayed the cost, but the effect of that was largely offset by precautions against suicide; men fettered hand and foot watched by slaves with heated irons are not easily encouraged. There were cries from a few caught opening a vein against a fetter's roughed edge or attempting to strangle each other. They were whipped for it, burned, then lash-

ed to the pillars to keep them from trying it again. The roaring of the beasts — beginning to be starved now — made night horrible, and there had been a grim rehearsal in the afternoon that left its impress on the prisoners' minds. The picture was ineradicable — of the empty seats, where presently free Romans and their wives and daughters would lean gasping, lips parted, to gloat at the carnage.

Nine elephants, tortured to make them dangerous, were trumpeting their indignation. Wolves, that were to tear their next meal from the throats of unarmed men, howled in melancholy chorus. Bulls bellowed; and a great rhinoceros — a rarity Rabirius had begged from Ptolemy the Piper — pounded his cage with a noise like a splintering ship. One whole cage full of leopards got loose in the night and wrought havoc before they were cornered with torches and netted. The torches set fire to the planks of the seats overhead, and when that was extinguished the carpenters came to rebuild, so that morning might find the arena undamaged — new-painted — a gleam in the sun.

It was under the din of the hammers, through the mingled stink and clamor of the beasts, that Tros heard a voice he thought he recognized. At first he mocked himself, believing he was dreaming. There were no lights, saving where the braziers glowed and where a guard or two moved phantom-like in gloom, occasionally pausing to insert a lamp between the bars and make sure that no prisoner should cheat the appetite of Rome by smothering himself. A shadow seemed to move within the shadow that lay slanting at the bars of Tros's cage — Nepos had assigned him to the cage-of-honor, reserved for women as a rule; where a breath of air could enter through the bars whenever any one passed through the wooden door into the unroofed arena. But Tros thought he had imagined that. He even looked away, not liking that imagination should deceive him;

it suggested that the horror of the situation had begun to undermine his self-control.

But the voice spoke louder:

"Master! This is Conops! I am come from Ostia! I have three boats below the fish-wharf on the Tiber! Sigurdsen picked up a breeze off Corsica and now stands off and on before the harbor-mouth, where two great triremes lie at anchor."

"How is it I had no word from you before this?" Tros demanded.

"Master, when I got to Ostia I knew that was no place for me! There were women and wine — no sight of Sigurdsen — I couldn't have resisted. So I stole a sail-boat and took with me a one-eyed slave, who called me brother. He wanted to escape to Corsica, where there are outlaws in the mountains, so he helped me to steal provisions from the stores behind the sheds where the imported slaves are quarantined, and we put to sea by night. I knew Sigurdsen would keep clear of the coast of Italy for fear of triremes. And I knew the pilot was a duffer who would want to sight land frequently. There was also food and water to consider; Sigurdsen would have to make some port of call before he dared put into Ostia with the chance of being chased away before he could reprovision; and besides, he would know you might want to put to sea at once, so he would fill the corn-bins and the water-butts at least. I picked him up the fourth day — saw his purple sails against the skyline.

"There was not much mutiny aboard. Such as it was soon quieted when I climbed over the rail. I gave them news of you. I said the Roman senate had proclaimed you admiral! But master, master, what is this! What —"

"Swiftly with your tale!" Tros ordered.

"I returned with the ship, and when we sighted Ostia we had to put that Roman pilot in the fore-peak. He was up to mischief, trying to lay us on a sandbank where the trireme men could come and pick us clean in the name of salvage. We had brought along Bagoas, the slave. We shaved his head and I rubbed some stain

on him, but he understood that the disguise wouldn't help him if he didn't act right. He was so afraid of being recognized and flogged to death for escaping that I had hard work to get him ashore.

"I was for hurrying to Rome. But the first Roman I met after I reached shore stopped me and asked whether I was Conops. I couldn't even talk Greek, naturally. I was from the western coast of Gaul and none too handy with any kind of speech, but quick-footed; and it was dark, so that was the last I saw of him. It seemed proper then to peel an eye before I cast off, so I sent Bagoas to a wine-shop to discover what was being said — you know the wineshop near the rope-walk, where the big fat Jewess sells charms against scurvy and all the freed men go to learn the shipping news? I didn't give Bagoas enough money to get drunk, and pretty soon he overheard a loud-mouthed man who was looking for two lost gladiators. He was from Rome that hour. I had the news of you as soon as One-Eye had swallowed his *quartarius*.

"One-Eye wanted to be rid of me then, so I warned him I'd sell him to informers if he didn't stand by, and I promised him a billet on the ship if he behaved himself. He was a stoker in the baths before he ran, so anything looked good to him. I sent him back to Sigurdson that night with orders to send our longboat and a dozen Northmen with a week's provisions. They were to row straight up-Tiber — there's no tide worth mentioning, and the stream isn't too swift, not for one of our boat's crews. They were to wait for me where the barges lie anchored below the brick-kilns on the south side of the river. Then I hired two more boats — good ones — money down; and there was big fish, tons of it, all waiting to be boated up to Rome as soon as ever the slave-gangs came down stream. But something had delayed the slave-gangs and the fish was liable to rot, so I made a bargain to boat that fish to Rome at half price, they to load it and the merchant to give me a pass in writing in the name of Nicephorus of Crete. That made me right with any one who might ask ques-

tions. Then I ran up-river to the brick-kilns and fetched the Northmen; and what between rowing and towing, and they not knowing any human language so they couldn't answer questions, we made Rome all right; and the man who paid me for delivering the fish agreed to give me a cargo of empty oil-jars if I'd cut the price and wait a week.

"I stipulated he should give my men a shed to sleep in, down there by the Tiber, and what with hinting I might do a bit of smuggling for him, and my not seeming to know the price of freightage on the Tiber, we struck up quite a friendship and the crew are as safe as weevils in a loaf of bread. They're supposed to be Belgæ, taken captive by Cæsar and sold in Gaul. I told him I'd left the papers for them with a Roman in Ostia who lent me money on that security; so he won't try any tricks; they'll be there when we want them.

"Then I went to Zeuxis' house, and found Helene talking with him. Something's up. They're hatching something. But she said where you are, so I brought Bagoas and came here to apply for a job to rig the awnings over the spectators' seats. That let me into the arena and the rest was easy. One of the guards here thinks I'm a slave belonging to the blacksmith who was fetched in a hurry to repair the hinges on the dungeon gate — the one that opens into the arena. That's his sledge you hear.

"But now, master, what next? I'm only a seafaring man, and I've probably overlooked a lot of things, but you just say the word and I'll do my best for you, by Heracles. I've left Bagoas out in the arena, where he's chewing onions and waiting for the dawn to go on rigging. We can easily escape into the street. What then? I'm at the rope's end. There are three boats waiting, and a good crew. We can row downstream like Hermes-in-a-hurry — but how get you out of here?"

Tros reached an arm between the bars and gripped his shoulder.

"Little man," he said; and then, for a few heart-beats there was nothing he could say at all.



"Go you back to Sigurdsen," he ordered. "Bid him stand by in the offing five more days. Then, if I come not, divide the ship between you — he to be captain, you lieutenant, sharing profits equally. But I believe that I will come before the five days. Go you back to Sigurdsen and take Bagoas."

"Nay, I will not!" Conops answered. "I will stay here. You have been my master since I taught you how to splice a rope-end and —"

"You shall obey me!" Tros retorted. "Go you and tell Sigurdsen I come in five days. Say nothing more to him — unless I come not — only bid him watch those triremes in the port of Ostia and show them his heels if they put to sea. But on the fourth day, or the fifth day after you reach Sigurdsen, if you should see our three boats putting out, stand in then with all three oar-banks manned and all sail ready to be shaken down. Stand by to pluck us out from right under the triremes' noses if you must."

"But, master —"

"Mutiny? In this pass? You are the man I have always trusted, Conops. Do as I bid you!"

"Master, if we never meet again —"

"By Heracles, if I could get out I would break your head for such dog's whimpering! Obey! Step lively! Shall the gods come to the aid of men who drown good bravery with tears like pork in brine? Of what use is a sentimental lingerer by cell-doors? Do you think this is a brothel, that you dawdle in it? Off with you! Almighty Zeus! Have I neglected discipline, that my own man should flout me and defy me when I bid him —"

"Nay, not Neptune would defy you in that mood, master. Farewell!"

"Farewell, Conops. And expect me on the fifth day after you reach Sigurdsen — or sooner! Keep two good men at the masthead. Grease all blocks and reeve new running gear wherever needed. Serve out grease to all the rowers and don't let them waste it on the oarports; watch them rub it on the leathers. If I find one speck

of dirt above-deck or below there will be Zeus's own reckoning to pay!"

## Chapter XXXI

### CIRCUS MAXIMUS

*I know the virtue of a fight. Who knows it better than I? For I have fought against beasts and men, the elements, mutinous crews, treachery, and my own ill-humor. If wisdom, aye, or cunning, aye, or a moderate measure of yielding what is mine, can not preserve me from a fight then let my enemy look to his guard. Peace, bought at the price of cowardice, is too dear. I love a fight that I have done my utmost to avoid — aye, it may be not all my utmost. I am human.*

*But I rate an animal more highly than the man who gluts his eyes on cruelty, feeding his own foulness with the sight of boughten slaughter. The fish, that slay only what they need, are less contemptible.*

From The Log of Tros of Samothrace

As the fungus grows on dunghills and the burned stump sends up shoots before it dies, life took a three day lease of hopeless men, and there were strange events within the dungeons while the chariot-racing lasted. No stone walls could shut out the blare of trumpets, the thunder of wheels and hoofs and the roar of the throng. Not a criminal down in the dark but knew the names of all the charioteers, and there was actually betting between cell and cell, men wagering their miserable pittances of bread, the doles of water or the questionable privilege of being last through the gate when the time came to face the arena. Last men usually got a taste of red-hot iron.

Dungeon-keepers, thronging at the gate to watch the racing, had to take turns hurrying below to name the winner of each *missus*, as a seven-round race was called; and there were twenty on the first day, twenty on the

second. If a dungeon-keeper carried the news tardily there was a clamor that set Nepos in a frenzy for his reputation; and it generally sent him to Tros in the end because he had formed a strange attachment to him and it calmed the old man's overwrought nerves to talk frankly. His sinews stood like taut cords from the mental tension he was under.

"I grow old, Tros, but I never lose the fascination of these last hours. I have seen so many die that you would think I should feel indifferent. I tell you, curiosity grips me harder now than when I first had charge of the slaves who lop the heads off prisoners of war after a triumph. When I trained the gladiators, it was always the same fascination — where do they go when they die? What do they think when their heads are cut off? Why is it that excitement seizes them when the time draws near? Races — that is only an excuse. If there were silence out there on the sand, they would find some other reason to act foolishly. Tros, I have seen men who have been tortured until hardly any flesh remained on arms and legs, laugh gaily on the last night — men so racked that they had to be carried in and staked in the arena for the beasts to maul. Why? What is it that so takes hold of them and makes them reckless of whip or anything?"

"So many men, so many points of view," said Tros.

"Aye, maybe. But one death for all of them, whatever caused it! You are probably about to die. What thoughts are calming you so that you sit and clean your belt, whereas I fret myself? Ho! Brutus! Take an iron down there and use it freely unless they stop that clamoring — The races, Tros, excite me not at all and I can watch men being tortured — aye, and women, without even curiosity. But when it comes to death I must confess that interests me. Tell me, of what are you thinking?"

"Of the destiny that governs us," Tros answered. "I have seen death, too, and I have not yet met the man who must die. But I believe it is impossible to kill a man until his time comes. And I think that if the

gods have use for any one they pluck him out of any danger. But they have no use for men who pray to them and waste good time and energy on whining. I am waiting for the gods to show me half an opportunity."

"But I was talking about death," objected Nepos. "In the next three days eight hundred men, including gladiators, are to die where now the chariots are racing. What think you of death?"

"It is like to-morrow. I will face it when it comes," Tros answered. "In the meantime I would like to meet the miscreant who made this belt. He fashioned it too narrow and forgot the sea-air calls for double tanning of the leather. I would let him feel the belt a time or two and learn his trade; some never learn until it dawns on them that being flogged hurts!"

"Have you no fear?" Nepos asked. "I have seen men so in the grip of fear that they could not feel."

"I am familiar with fear," Tros answered. "It has also grown familiar with me and has abandoned many of its tricks as useless. Now I am afraid of one thing only — that the Britons may believe I have deserted them. There is a king in Britain, and a woman by the name of Fflur, his wife, who love me, and I love them. It would be a miserable destiny to die and leave them thinking I had never even run a risk to protect them from Cæsar."

"But if you went free, could you do that? How?" asked Nepos.

Tros's leonine eyes observed him for a moment. He was instantly alert for signals that the gods might give.

"If I should swear to you that I am telling naked truth, would you believe me and not ask questions?" he demanded.

Nepos nodded.

"I have heard strange truth from many a man in this place under a seal of secrecy. No law obliges me to tell what I learn here. Whoever comes into the *carceres*, the law has done with; he is a dead man and his secrets die too. But if you speak of the Vestal Virgins I will not listen, because —"

"I will not speak of them," said Tros. "But I will say this — if the gods, or you, or any one can get me out of here alive — and I will not go, mind you, without the men who call me master! — I can call off Cæsar."

"How?"

"By turning him toward Rome! That is naked truth, on my oath by the shrines of Samothrace."

"You have a message for him from — you mean, that if you reach him —"

"He will take his eyes off Britain and make Rome his goal. He will believe the time has come to try out destiny!" said Tros.

The Roman throng in the arena roared like mad beasts — shrieked, yelled, clamored — as a four-horse chariot went down under another's wheels. The tumult swallowed up the roaring of the beasts and there were warning trumpet blasts to stop stamping that might wreck the rows of seats. Expectancy silenced the dungeons, until suddenly they burst into a tumult because nobody reported what had caused the uproar. At a nod from Nepos half a dozen men went into the arena, armed with hooks and ropes, to drag away dead horses and a mangled man.

"Their first taste of blood!" said Nepos. "This time to-morrow you will hear them offering money to the charioteers to smash their opponents' wheels! There's little chance for any novice such as your man."

"So?" said Tros.

"No chance at all. They'll roll him in the sand before he goes around the *spina* once. However, I have always thought Pompeius Magnus was a danger to Rome. He has none of the true bronze in him that Cæsar has. Cæsar can be cruel; he has virtue; he is not afraid of anything and he isn't lazy. Cato is wrong about Cæsar, as I have told him half a hundred times. And so you think the gods make use of you and me? I doubt it. That is not a Roman way of thinking of the gods. However, each to his own theory — and death to us all in the end! Well, Tros, keep up your courage. I would like to see Julius Cæsar come to discipline this city!



And if Pompey accused you of intriguing with — Who should know better than They what will happen? Well, keep up your courage. It's against the rules for any one to beg their favor or to hand them a petition, and it's death, mind you, to insult them, but listen now! There's no law against, for instance —"

Nepos hesitated. He was actually trembling. Vestal Virgins were a power so intensely revered that even in the *carceres* their name was sacrosanct. Not only were they unapproachable, but all the reverence of Rome for her traditions and her old grim gods had centered — rallied, as it were — around the persons of the Vestals. They alone were without blemish and without reproach.

"Not even Pompey dares to put a spite on *them*!" said Nepos. "But do they know you are in here? I'll bet they don't. Who told them? You can't have told them. They will know for the first time when they see you march out of the dungeon gate. Well — there is no law against my changing the arrangements. Listen — when I send you in to face the lions, march you straight to Pompey's box and there salute him. That is something only gladiators are supposed to do. Then turn toward the Vestals in the box beside him on his right hand and salute them. Maybe then they'll recognize you. Who knows? The attendants are supposed to loose the lions instantly when you appear but I will bid them wait while you march once around the arena and let the populace observe how gallantly you bear yourselves. When you have slain the lions, make no appeal but await the Numidians close to the Vestals' box. And the same when the Numidians are beaten and the gladiators come. Then, if the Vestals choose to spare you, they will have the verdict of the populace and Pompey himself will have to bow to it."

Within the dungeon recklessness increased as time wore on. The night after the second day of racing a rebellion broke out and nearly ended in escape. A score of men pounced on the guard who entered their dark hole to feed them, robbed him of his hooked

club, slew him, seized the hot irons from the braziers and stormed the stairway leading to the upper cells. Extra guards were summoned from the outside and for an hour there was infernal war by torchlight until all the men who had escaped were roped and four guards, suffering from ghastly wounds inflicted by a hooked club, had been carried out. All the while the fighting lasted Nepos' voice kept threatening drastic penalties to any guard who "spoiled" a man; as he expressed it; they were needed whole for the arena, able to stand up and die excitingly, so it was the guards, that night, who suffered.

"Nevertheless," said Nepos, "they shall wish they had refrained from that attempt. That batch was destined for the elephants, who slay swiftly. Now they shall be torn by dogs, and they shall enter the arena first."

His honor was offended by the outbreak and he even put an extra chain and lock on Tros's cell door.

"Not that I doubt your good-will, but a madness seizes men at times and they act like leopards," he explained. "I have known prisoners to break the bars and kill the other prisoners who would not join them."

But he let Tros out of his cell next day to watch the racing through a small hole in the dungeon wall. He fettered his wrists behind his back and chained him to a ring-bolt in the stone floor, as he explained it, to prevent the guards from telling tales about him; but the truth was, Nepos was himself half mad with nervousness, as fascinated by the prospect of the butchery to come as were the citizens who packed the seats in the arena.

They were yelling now for blood. It did not satisfy them that the charioteers showed almost superhuman skill in swinging four-horse teams around the curves at each end of the course; they urged the men to break each other's wheels, to cut in and break horses' legs, to beat each other with their whips. They howled and whistled when a man won easily. And when the next teams lined up for the start, instead of waiting breath-

less for the starter to give the signal from his box they yelled advice to the contestants to play foul and hurled abuse to the officials whose duty it was to compel the charioteers to line up properly along the oblique starting-line which was arranged to compensate the outside chariot for the wider circle it must make at the farther end.

The *spina* down the center, adorned with flagpoles and dolphins, was as crowded with spectators as were the surrounding tiers of seats. The mob roared loudest when a group who leaned over the *spina*, clinging to one another, fell and were crushed under chariot-wheels; their bodies tripped a four-horse team and the resulting crashing carnage produced roars of satisfaction that aroused the lions and indignant elephants — so that it was impossible to get the horses started for the next race until attendants seized their heads and some of them were kicked and crushed under the wheels.

It was mid-afternoon before Owric's turn came, and the din that greeted him from the upper seats was evidence enough that Zeuxis and Helene had neglected nothing that could stir the popular imagination. He was dressed like any other charioteer, in Roman tunic, with a red badge to distinguish him, and came out first of four teams through the archway, in a chariot bearing Pompey's monogram. That meant that he had drawn the inside berth, and the betting odds changed in his favor rapidly, as the mob's voice indicated, breaking into short staccato barks.

There was a breathless silence as the four teams moved up to the line, each charioteer reining and urging his horses to get them on their toes — then suddenly an uproar like a vast explosion as the chariot next to Owric's swerved in to lock wheels and pin him up against the *spina* — a trick often played on novices to spoil their chance before the race began. But the uproar broke into a tumult of astonished laughter at the neatness with which the unknown man shot clear of the entanglement and, wheeling, struck the offending

veteran across the face. The crowd applauded him until the frantic horses nearly broke out of control, and the more they plunged and fought the men who tried to hold their heads, the more the spectators thundered, stamping their feet until attendants armed with staves belabored them to save the wooden floors.

Then laughter; for the race was a procession of three chariots pursuing Orwic's, weaving in and out, maneuvering to wreck each other at the turns, but never coming within lengths of the bay team driven by the Briton, who could hug corners with his horses belly-to-the-earth because he had been taught from infancy to do the same thing with scythe-armed chariots on either hand. The unknown man was in his element. In contrast to the furious histrionics of the others he was quiet, almost motionless. Excepting at the corners, which he took on one wheel like a sail-boat in a squall, he stood erect, his only gesture a salute to Pompey's box and to the Vestals as he whirled by.

Men threw money at him; women, flowers when the race was over. Crowned with a wreath of myrtle leaves he was sent once around the course at a slow gallop to acknowledge the applause and Pompey, ignorant of who he was, threw his own wreath down to him. The significance of that could hardly have escaped even a Northman. Orwic reined in to receive the wreath from an attendant, and as Pompey gave his seat to a substitute to preside over the last three races and turned to leave the box he waved his hand in acknowledgment of Orwic's courteous salute. The last three races were run in a half filled Circus; the noisiest spectators had won money at exhilarating odds, and had gone home to exult about it and to rest in preparation for the much more thrilling entertainment to begin to-morrow.

It was night when Orwic came, spluttering and gasping at the prison stench and pinching at Tros's muscles through the bars.

"A man rots swiftly in a dungeon," he remarked, then laughed, a little reassured because Tros gripped him with a sudden strength that hurt.

"Tros, twenty men have tried to buy me from Helene! I was mobbed out there behind the stables! If it weren't that I'm supposed to be Helene's slave I never could have got here. I'd be drunker than a sailor! She pretended I was in danger from the other charioteers — and that was true, they'd kill me if they had a chance.

"She had her own slaves spirit me away and one of Zeuxis' fellows brought me here after dark. Good Lud of Lunden, what a land of stinks! Helene is now spreading rumors that one of Pompey's men has had me thrown into the arena because she refused to sell me, and that he had bribed the peregrine prætor,\* whatever that is, to refuse to interfere. It was difficult for me to understand, because the interpreter she had to use knew only a little Gaulish, but I gathered she is working up a great reception for us. What are we supposed to do? Fight lions? Men, too? Romans? I will gladly take a long chance for the sake of gutting half a dozen Romans! How are the men? And have the weapons come? Oh, by the way; Helene said this, or so I understood her; mind you, she is using an interpreter:

" 'If you deny me, you shall lose your ship. If you accept me, you have only to fight gallantly and you shall sail away.'

"It sounded like a threat, Tros, but she is working day and night to save you. So is Zeuxis. I understood Zeuxis to say that Conops turned up and joined you in the *carceres*. What happened to him?"

Nepos came and with a nod of recognition let Orwic into Tros's cell. He was too busy for conversation, but he grinned and jerked his thumb up to encourage Tros. His face looked like a demon's in the lantern light, with tortured, nervous eyes that lacked sleep. Tros and Orwic talked until silence fell, then slept. That night the only men within the *carceres* who did not sleep were the suspicious guards, who prodded prisoners at

\*The official whose duty it was to concern himself with foreigners, presiding over their litigation and, to some extent, protecting them.



intervals through cell bars to assure themselves that none had cheated the arena.

## Chapter XXXII

### THE LINK BREAKS

*No wise man fights. Wisdom solves all riddles, and a fight proves nothing except which of a number of fools can hit the harder blow. To be compelled to fight is a confession of stupidity or worse, and very likely worse.*

*But few are wise. Unwisdom traps us in the nets of savagery, from which fear finds no way of escape. Then the luckier fool may win, unless the lesser fool remembers, even in the tumult of the fighting, Wisdom that has no fight to win.*

*The fool says the fight shall settle something; it shall be the end of this or that. Let the lesser fool remember there is no end of folly, but there is a beginning of Wisdom. Let him storm the gates of Wisdom toward a new beginning. Then, though that gate be death, that he assaulted it as a Beginning shall have brought him a little nearer to a true goal. Wisdom, it appears to me, will be at least as useful to us beyond death as on this side.*

*I have never known Wisdom to counsel cowardice.*

From the Log of Tros of Samothrace

Dawn heard the roaring begin, as the populace poured into the seats to make sure none should forestall them by bribing the attendants. There were frequent fights, enormously enjoyed by those whose right to their seats was undisputed; and the shouting of the sweet-meat and provision vendors never ceased until the vast arena was a sea of sweating faces and the *equites* and senators began to occupy the seats reserved for them — seats that had been specially protected overnight by raising the wooden wall in front of them.

The *spina* down the midst had been removed. The Circus was a sea of clean sand glittering in sunlight. Colored awnings, stretched over the seats on decorated masts threw one half of the spectators into shade, except where hot rays shone through gaps where the awnings were roped together. There was a constant thunder from the canvas shaking in the morning wind. Roaring and baying of starved animals provided grim accompaniment. The blended tumult resembled thunder of surf on a rock-bound beach.

Tros, fettered as before, was allowed to take his place at the hole in the wall, with Orwić chained beside him. Tros asked leave to inspect the weapons, but Nepos, irritable to the verge of madness, snarled at him:

“Govern yourself! I have had trouble enough! I have lost eight good guards!”

There was not an object left, in the enclosure by the gate that opened into the arena, which a prisoner might seize and turn into a weapon. The guards' clubs were fastened to their wrists by heavy thongs. The braziers were set in place behind a grille, where grimy slaves made ready to pass hot irons to the guards; and the first batch of prisoners — they who had staged the outbreak — were hustled in readiness into the irregularly shaped enclosure whose fourth side was the great door that should presently admit them to their death. They all wore clean but very scanty clothing, their own filthy garments having been ripped to rags in the struggle two nights previous; and most of them, acutely conscious of the red-hot irons, managed to look alert, almost eager for the tragedy. They joked. They even laughed. They called themselves the elephants' dinner, unaware yet that the method of their execution had been changed.

But first there was a ceremony in the sunshine. To a great heraldic blare of trumpets all the gladiators marched in through the gate that had admitted chariots the day before and, facing Pompey in a line, saluted him, one gladiator making a speech. There were about three hundred armed men, very splendid in their dif-

ferent accoutrements, as dignified and perfect in shape and muscle as so many sculptor's gods.

Another blast of trumpets sounded and a mock-engagement took place — parry and thrust with wooden weapons, wonderfully executed but mechanical. It lasted until the crowd grew restless and began to whistle. Then another trumpet blast and all the gladiators marched out, leaving breathless silence in their wake — and two lone, nearly naked slaves who stood beside a trap-door fifty feet away from the eye-hole where Tros and Orwic watched. Each held a rope in one hand and with the other clung to one of the pegs by which they were to climb from danger.

Trumpets again, and some one swung the dungeon gate, admitting a glare of dazzling sunlight. Slaves passed the hot irons and Nepos' men drove out the prisoners, flourishing the irons behind them and thrusting at those who were last. The great gate swung shut and for a minute the two score looked about them, blinking at the rows and rows of faces. Then the two slaves pulled the trap and jumped clear, one of them worried by the famished dogs that poured out of the trap yelping for their first meal in nearly a week.

The crowd looked on in silence until two of the prisoners, mad with terror, ran as if to throw themselves before Pompey and beg to be spared. A dozen dogs gave chase, and there began to be a snarl of passion, punctuated by the shrill, excited screams of women, as the Romans felt the vice of it take hold of them. There was a choking roar when half a dozen dogs pulled down the runners; and the roar grew to a din that drowned the yelping when the other dogs all raced toward the prisoners who stood grouped near the dungeon-gate.

It was not over soon, nor easily. The dogs dragged some of the frenzied wretches to the sand and worried them, but there were six dogs to a man, all fighting for the victim's throat and stomach. Two or three men fought the dogs off with their fists. One slew a dog by choking him, and with the carcass guarded himself desperately until a great brute caught him by the arm

and pulled him over backward. Utterly bereft of reason by the horror of it as another fifty dogs were loosed out of a trap, the remaining prisoners ran for their lives, until the last one went down under twenty dogs and the two packs started fighting one another.

Men in masks then, representing the infernal regions, came out of a door beside the *spoliarium* to drag away the mangled bodies. Fifty men in line, with whips and torches, drove the dogs back through the hole they came from, and a dozen men with buckets scattered fresh sand where the blood lay. Then again the crowd stared at an empty rectangle of sand and two slaves, clinging to their pegs, stood by a trap-door facing Pompey's box. There was a gasp of expectation now. Each turn was always more absorbing than the last.

Nepos had herded fifty men and women into the inclosure behind the gate and they were begging to be told what fate awaited them. A woman fainted; they revived her with a hot iron. A man tried to kill a guard who mocked him, so they tore his muscles with the hooks and then, because he could not stand — or would not — they lashed him with cords to two others and so sent him into the arena when the door swung wide.

This time the slaves released three maddened elephants that raced around the Circus before their little blood-shot eyes saw human beings at their mercy — beings of the same sort that had tortured them for three days in the darkened cage. There was a havoc then that pleased Rome to the marrow. Men were tossed over the barrier and thrown back to be finished off. One monster seized a woman in its trunk and beat her head off against the barrier beneath the Vestals' seats. Another chased a woman all around the Circus, seeming to enjoy her screams, and, when she fell at last, knelt slowly on her, as if kneeling in salute to Pompey. The crowd took that for an omen and yelled —

“Pompeius Magnus Imerator!”

There was no capturing those elephants. The maddened brutes were ready to face torches — anything. When they had crushed the last cowering victim and

flattened his head in the sand they set off once again around the Circus, pausing here and there to trample on a crushed corpse and to scream back at the mob that roared with a frenzy no less bestial than theirs. The gladiators had to march out and despatch the elephants, and that was the crowd's first taste that day of anything resembling fair fight.

They took the side of the elephants, forever popular in Rome since Carthage fell and Rome learned to amuse herself with monsters that were dangerous to friend and foe alike on battlefields. A hundred gladiators armed with spears essayed to corner them and kill them where it would be easy to drag out the carcasses, and each time that the elephants charged through the line the crowd applauded madly, disregarding the pluck of men who knelt and met them point-first — usually to be trampled, even though they thrust the spear home in the monster's belly.

Teams of horses dragged out the enormous carcasses. The men in masks came from the *spoliarium* with hooks to set under the arms of dead or injured gladiators and haul them out of sight. Fresh sand was strewn, and once again a bare arena sparkled in the sun.

And now the populace's blood was up. They were in no mood to be entertained with any lesser spectacle. The third turn had to be a climax that should glut their appetite for murder — as the men who managed the proceedings well knew — unless they were to yell death- verdicts for expensive gladiators later on. If satiated now with butchery they might let live the wounded men who presently should lie face-upward and appeal for magnanimity; and it took time and money, besides skill to train a gladiator, who, though he were too severely wounded to appear again in the arena, was as marketable as a horse. The fashion of employing gladiators as the personal attendants of even the women of rank had put a premium on wounded men from the arena. And these scarred and grizzled *passé* warriors, decked out far more gorgeously than in their palmiest fighting days, became expensive luxuries.



So a hundred criminals were herded into the inclosure by the dungeon gate — all “enemies of Rome,” as Nepos thoughtfully remarked — and they were all clothed decently to make their death the more spectacular. Nor were they thrust forth as the others had been, to stand blinking and bewildered near the gate. They were herded by Nepos’ guards into the very center of the Circus and there provided with wooden swords with which to make a mockery of self-defense. One man contrived to kill himself with his ridiculous weapon before the guards were out of the arena, and the guards had to hasten retreat at the cost of their own dignity; the master of the ceremonies ordered the traps raised instantly to prevent other victims from cheating the spectators.

Simultaneously, out of ten doors spaced at equal intervals around the arena came tigers, lions, wolves, bears and a great rhinoceros. The latter was received with roars of approbation, which apparently confused him; for a moment he stood blinking at the sunlight, then turned on a tiger suddenly, impaled him on his horn and crushed him against the wooden barricade. The tiger’s claws provided all the necessary impulse that was lacking. He began to attack the other animals, but suddenly grew conscious of the helpless mass of humans in the midst of the arena and went straight at them like a avalanche on four legs.

He was violence untrameled — senseless — an incarnate cataclysm. He impaled his victims, tossed them, trampled down a swath among them, ripped them open, shook the blood and entrails from his eyes and charged until turning so often left him breathless and he stood with drooped head waiting to recover and begin again.

The lions, wolves and tigers were mere supernumerary skirmishers, who picked off victims scattered by the monster. Famished though they were, they dreaded him and kept clear. When he paused at last, and twenty human victims in a group stood back to back to guard themselves against the lions — and the lions sprang in,

maddened by the ineffective weapons — the rhinoceros recovered zeal and rammed his weight into the mass, impaling indiscriminately, tossing a great lion in the air and mowing men into a mass of crimson pulp. Wolves tore the wounded. Tigers struck down any who escaped out of the carnage. And the Roman populace exulted as if all Elysium were at its feet.

Then more excitement as the gladiators entered to destroy the brutes that had destroyed the human victims. The extravagance of killing a rhinoceros that was known to have cost enough to feast a whole precinct of Rome raised the whole tone of the orgy in the estimation of the mob; and the big brute slew three gladiators before a luckier one knelt and drove a spear into his belly. Then a dozen others closed in on him with their swords and the horse-teams dragged the carcass out. The last of the tigers was slain by a *retiarius* with net and trident, after the tiger had wounded half a dozen men.

While slaves were strewing fresh sand and the clamor of the crowd was gradually dying to a satisfied, expectant hum, Tros turned and found Nepos beside him.

"Your turn now," he said. "They are in a good mood."

He released Tros's wrists, then Orwic's, and gave Tros his sword. It was the same one he had left in Zeuxis' house. The Northmen came out of the cage like great bears growling, studying the axes handed to them by the prison guards.

"Lord Tros, these are not our weapons! These are rotten-hafted choppers for a housewife's kindling!"

They appeared to think that Tros had cheated them. Alternatively they were ready to wreak vengeance on the guards, who stood back, ready with their hooked clubs, reaching hands through the grille to receive red-hot "persuaders" from the slaves.

Tros examined an ax. It was the sort of tool the Romans served out to the slaves whom it was reckoned inadvisable to trust with anything too nearly like a

weapon — half the weight of the broad-bladed axes that the Northmen used.

“Those are the axes that Zeuxis sent,” said Nepos. “There are twelve spears for the Britons. It is too late now for —”

“Too late now for Zeuxis!” Tros said grimly. “Nepos, will you —”

He had all but fallen from the dignity of Samothrace! To have asked Nepos to take vengeance on the Greek would have undone in a moment all the magic Tros knew. The gods, whoever or whatever they are, love him who sees main issues and avoids the byways of revengeful spite. It needed no clairvoyance to appreciate that Zeuxis — characterless rascal — had succumbed at the last minute to the dread that Tros, if not slain in the Circus, might denounce him after all. Let the gods pay Zeuxis.

“It is too late to replace those. Probably Zeuxis’ slaves misunderstood him. Can you give us other weapons?”

Nepos grinned.

“Aye! Tros, you should have been a Roman! Ho, there! Poniards and targets!”

They were long, lean poniards and shields of toughened bronze that clattered on the floor as fast as Nepos’ guards could bring them from the storeroom. And for Tros there was a buckler that a Thracian had carried to his death. A wave-edged scimitar a yard long and a wooden Gaulish shield with iron studs for Orwic.

Then the trùmpets sounded and the great gate swung, admitting light that dazzled all the Northmen’s eyes.

They kept the futile axes — thrust the poniards into their belts — and followed Tros, who ordered Orwic out alone in front of him, ten paces in the lead.

“Remember now!” said Nepos, as the great gate swung shut at the nervous Britons’ backs.

The Northmen marched in two lines behind Tros, Britons bringing up the rear, Tros keeping up a running admonition to prevent them from thinking their own thoughts and abandoning their discipline in panic. The

enormous Circus and the mass of faces, leaning, leering, lusting — the anticipation that suggested ambush and the unpredictable — the glitter, glare and color, and the hush were likely to have unnerved Tros himself unless he had had men who looked to him to carry himself bravely and direct their destiny.

“So — you will fight as I have taught you when we practised on the upper deck repelling boarders — Room for a weapon to swing, and no more — ranks closing swiftly when a man goes down — wounded crawl to the center, keeping clear of feet. — Each wounded man keep hold of his weapon — pass it to any comrade who is disarmed — Swift with the stab; very slow to recover; eyes on the enemy’s — ears listening for orders! When the lions come, steady — and step forward as they spring. Then duck and stab!”

They were midway to the center before a small group of spectators recognized the gallant youngster in the lead. But then, as if some one were organizing a demonstration, they began to shout his name:

“Ignotus! Ignotus!”

Recognition swelled into a roar as Orwic waved the wreath he had received as victor. They who had won money betting on him doubled and redoubled the applause until the whole arena was a-roar with curiosity and new excitement, changing — so it seemed — the very atmosphere. No better man than Orwic could have strode alone to take that thundering ovation; he was to the manner born, and though he walked without the measured Roman dignity, his own was no less captivating. He had won the crowd’s mood with a gesture, and the Northmen, ignorant of what was happening, accepted all the acclamation as their own due; Tros could feel their changed emotion as they formed up at his back and stood in line in front of Pompey, with the white-robed Vestals gazing at them from the draped seats of their own inclosure, well to the front, on Pompey’s right.

No Vestal made the slightest sign that Tros could detect; they were stern-faced women with their faces

framed in white — apparently emotionless; four arbiters of life and death. The obligation to attend the sacred flame of Vesta made it always necessary for two to remain on duty to relieve each other. To the right and left of Pompey's box the senators and *equites* — no interest less thrilling would have brought them from their country villas — sat with faces flushed, their attitude an effort to appear calm although every un-studied movement betrayed tense excitement. They were laughing cynically — chattering — their voices drowned by the enormous volume of the crowd's roar.

Pompey was talking to some one who knelt at his side — by his costume a slave, by his bearing a messenger. A dozen gaudily dressed Romans, men and women,\* who were Pompey's guests, appeared to listen eagerly to what the messenger was saying; not an eye in all that sumptuously decorated box was turned toward the men about to die in the arena. The salute they gave was unreturned, although the mob applauded the raised axes of the Northmen as a new barbaric detail introduced for their amusement. Tros growled to Orwic:

“Ready now! Lud's luck — and a blow for your friends in Britain!”

He faced his men; and if he felt afraid they never knew it!

“Ye are my men, and I have come to die or live with you. Do me no shame this day!”

Then, with his men behind him, he followed Orwic to the very midst of the arena; and as he turned he saw that Pompey leaned out of his box to speak to the Great Vestal, who was nearest to him of the four majestic women. The attendant slave-women pressed

\*The Circus was the only public spectacle at which the sexes were not separated.



forward as to protect the Vestals' privacy.\* Tros saw the old gray Vestal's lips move. When he shouted to his men again there was a note of triumph in his voice:

"Think you has Odin lost the way to Rome? Does Thor sleep? And is Lud of Lunden rotting in the Thames? Forget you are in Rome, and fight now for your own gods! Steady!"

Faithful to his promise, Nepos had contrived that the lions should be kept in until Tros was ready. He had almost overdone the kindness and the crowd was giving vent to its impatience when the doors were raised at last from five dens and the yellow brutes came hurrying out into the sunlight. There were marks on some of them of hot iron. There was not a second's interval before they saw their quarry and began to creep up, crouching, blinking, stalking for a flank attack — so many of them that Tros never tried to count.

But there was no opening in the solid square of men that faced four ways at once. Tros stood alone, in front, on one side; Orwic on the other to stiffen the Britons, who were not so easy to make battle-brave. And, since they two looked easier to kill, there was a sudden lightning motion nearly too swift for the eye to follow as three brutes at once leaped at each of them, snarling. Then the *mêlée*! There was not a second to be spared for rallying the men or for a thought of anything but butchery — ax, poniard and sword outlicking with the speed of light as fifty lions leaped after the first against the solid square. One dragged a Briton down and through the gap three lions leaped in, to be slain by Northmen. Bleeding from a claw-wound, stepping forward with his buckler raised, Tros drove his long sword through a lion's heart and turned to face another, stooping to entice the brute to spring,

\*The Vestals were chosen as children and obliged to take the vow for a period of thirty years, but it was rarely that a Vestal availed herself of the privilege of retirement and many continued in office until they died of old age.

then straightening himself suddenly and thrusting upward. He could only fight and hope his men were standing firm. He found breath for their battle-cry and roared it:

“Odin! Odin!”

He could hear their answering roar, but it was all mixed up with lions’ snarling and the tumult from the mob, until — as suddenly as the assault began — the butchery was over and he turned to see his square unbroken, three men and himself but slightly injured, and one Briton dead. His Northmen grinned at him, filling their lungs and breathing heavily — awaiting praise. He nodded to them, which was praise enough. Three lions dragged themselves away, blood dripping from them, and a fourth uninjured, raced around the Circus looking for a chance to leap the barrier. The Northmen showed him half a dozen rotten axes broken, but Orwic laughed gaily from the far side of the square —

“Tros, don’t you wish those brutes were Romans!”

There was nothing now to make the crowd impatient — not a second’s pause. A gate swung open at the end that faced the *carceres*. Numidians came running in, their ostrich-feather plumes all nodding as they shook their shields in time to a barbaric chant, their long spears flashing in the sun.

Tros turned his eyes toward the Vestal Virgins, but they seemed not to be looking. Pompey was still leaning from his box, apparently engaged in conversation with the *Virgo Vestalis Maxima*.

There were sixty, not fifty Numidians, and they appeared to have been told their task was easy. Their black, almost naked bodies shone like polished ebony as they began to play and prance to draw the crowd’s applause. Groups of three gave chase to the wounded lions and slew them with their long spears, while a dozen others stalked the one uninjured beast and, finally surrounding him, coaxed him to spring, when they knelt and received him on spear-points.

Hurriedly Tros put his Britons in the center of the

square and made them surrender their spears to the Northmen whose axes were broken.

“Watch your chance. Seize the weapons of the fallen enemy!” he commanded. Then, to the Northmen, “Fight as if repelling boarders! If the square breaks, form again!”

He left Orwic on the far side of the square, for the Numidians were circling to attack on all four sides at once. Their leader, a lean Titan of oil-polished ebony with a leopard-skin over his shoulder, yelled, chose Tros as his own objective —

And in a second they engaged, on-rushing like a wind-storm of their native desert — fierce as fire — undisciplined as animals. Their leader leaped, down-stabbing with his spear — Tros’s long sword took him in the throat. Crashing above the tumult, he could hear the crowd roar “*Habet!*” as another black man seized Tros’s buckler, bearing down on it to make an opening for two others’ spears. Out licked a Northman’s ax and bit into a feathered head. As suddenly, Tros’s long sword saved the Northman. A poniard, up-stabbing with the heft of all the Baltic under it, went home into encrimsoned ebony, and there was room again — time for a glance over-shoulder.

“Odin! Odin!”

The unbroken square was fighting mad, and through the corner of his eye Tros saw the unarmed Britons crawling between legs to seize Numidian spears — one Northman down, a Briton dragging him — and then a riot-roar as the spectators cheered on the Numidians — a howling onslaught, and the crash of battle in which no man knew what happened, except that the rush ceased and there were black men bleeding on the sand. A third of the Numidians fell back and hesitated, leaderless and numbed by the jeers of the crowd.

“Lord Tros, we stand firm!” cried a Northman, and fell dead. A Briton dragged his body to the center of the square. The other Northmen closed the gap, their left arms measuring the space to make sure there was room to fight. Then Orwic’s voice:

"All over, Tros! They have no more courage. Shall we charge and rout them?"

The Numidians retreated and began arguing, until a few took dead men's spears and, rushing to within six paces, hurled them; but the bucklers stopped those missiles easily and the spectators jeered again, beginning to shout for action, booing, whistling, bellowing "Ignotus!"

"Tros, I beg you, let us charge!" cried Orwic.

But Tros was aware of two things. Pompey was still talking to the Vestal — and the great gate at the end of the arena had been opened. Two long lines of gladiators, helmeted and armed with sword and buckler, began marching in with the mechanical precision of consul's bodyguard, saluting with a flash of raised swords as the last pair entered and the great gate closed behind them. Tros could hardly make his voice heard above the thundering ovation of the crowd:

"Change formation — into two lines — backs toward the Vestals! Orwic, stand by me!"

He bade them let the wounded lie. The pass was desperate. He formed his double line into a semicircle with its ends retired toward the side where the Vestals and Pompey and all the senators and *equites* were seated.

"Now ye shall show me what Odin begat, and whether Lud of Lunden raised a brood of men! Behold — those gladiators drive the blacks against us. Slay or be slain! Give ground slowly toward the wall!"

No time for another word. A blast of trumpets. The gladiators, forty of them, separating into pairs with the precision of a guard of honor on parade, came forward at the run, outflanking the bewildered Numidians, urging them forward with gestures, presently stabbing at those in the rear. The Numidians, clustering, not understanding, then suddenly desperate, broke, surged, gathered again, stabbed back at the gladiators — and then fled before them, frenzied, brandishing their spears — stark mad — a whirlwind. And then — shambles!

It was cataclysm without sense or reason in it —

slaughter wrought unconsciously, the muscles moving as the heart beat, without signal from the brain — sheer wanton instinct let loose in an orgy of destruction — with the rolling whites of men's eyes, crimson blood on black skin — scornfully handsome Roman faces under brazen helmets at the rear — a deafening din, like a thunder of surf, from the onlookers — the only memory that survived.

Thereafter, no pause, but a change of movement and a measured method in the madness, with a gradual return of conscious will. The gladiators smiled, and that was something. They invited death as if it were a play-mate; they inflicted it with scientific skill aloof from malice; they were artful and deliberate, their recklessness a mask beneath which awful energy and calculation lurked. They were as sudden as forked lightning, with an air of having all eternity in which to study their opponents' method.

Tros found himself engaged by one young veteran of twenty-five, bronze-muscled, with a glow of health like satin on his skin, and on his lips the smile of fifty victories. He had the short sword of the Roman legionary and a big bronze shield, short bronze greaves and a gleaming helmet; with the exception of those he was almost naked, so that every movement he made went rippling along his skin.

The moment he singled out Tros and engaged him the spectators began roaring "Glaucus! Glaucus!" and it sickeningly dawned on Tros that, though this man might have promised Nepos, the spectators were in no mood to spare any wounded combatant. They were yelling for massacre, cruelty, death, for the uttermost peak of emotion; and Glaucus, all-wise in the signs, with a glance at the crowd beneath the buckler upraised on his arm, confirmed it —

*"Est habendum!"*

He was still good-natured. Attitude and smile were invitations to submit to the inevitable and receive the thrust under the breastbone that should end the matter swiftly. There was not a trace of malice in his smile



swiftly. There was not a trace of malice in his smile when he discerned that Tros refused that easy death. He parried Tros's long, lunging thrust and sprang in with a laugh to crush an instep with his heel and stab before Tros could give ground.

Earth, sky and walls appeared to shake under the thunder of the tumult when the favorite of Rome went reeling backward and fell headlong, tripping over a dead Numidian. He had not realized he had a swordsman facing him — that that old instep trick, and the reply to it, was something Tros learned long before ever a razor touched his face. Glaucus rolled and sprang clear with a cat's agility, and laughed, but he was at Tros's mercy if a pair of gladiators had not cut in to protect him. *Mêlée* again; a Northman sprang to Tros's aid. Three more Northmen battle-axed their adversaries and crashed their way to Orwic's side. Tros slew two men. The crowd yelled his praises. Glaucus, venomous at last, called off two other gladiators and again opposed himself to Tros.

There was a sharp command from Glaucus. The other gladiators formed themselves into a phalanx. The expectant crowd drew breath like one thrilled monster, greedy for the coming masses assault — the staggering, reeling line — and then, when Tros should have been separated from his men, the final single combat.

But the art of generalship lies in unexpectedness. Not for nothing had Tros drilled and drilled his crew in deep-sea battle practice. They were used to his roar — obeyed it. Instantly he formed his double line into a wedge, himself its apex, bringing forth a roar of admiration from the crowd, who, loathing discipline themselves, adored to watch it.

Gradually wheeling, with a crabwise movement, sullenly, Tros gave ground, offering his flanks to tempt the phalanx to an indiscretion. And because the gladiators knew Fabian tactics would only annoy

the crowd, they shouted and came on, aiming their sudden rush so as to cut Tros off from the arena wall and drive him out toward the center where he and his survivors could be surrounded.

The spectators stood on the benches and had to be beaten down again. An ocean of sound, as if the very sky were falling, drowned the clash of weapons. Tros moved on the arc of a parabola and struck the phalanx sidewise with his wedge, splitting it diagonally with the fury of a Baltic blast, his Northmen bellowing their bull-mouthed battle-cry.

They burst into the left end of the phalanx. The gladiators lost formation. They tried to re-form and lost seconds doing it. Glaucus, skillfully avoiding Orwic, plunged into the mêlée, hurling men out of his way, challenging Tros. It was a milling shambles, weight against weight, fury against fury, with the gladiators losing — losing their heads, too, as their numbers thinned. All the axes were broken. Northmen and Britons alike fought now with poniards and spears.

Glaucus reached Tros, sprang at him from behind a gladiator whom Tros slew with a lunging thrust that bent his buckler and went past it deep into the man's breast. That mighty blow left Tros extended, with his buckler useless on his left arm and his sword-point in a man's ribs. Glaucus sprang to stab him between neck and shoulder.

"Ah-h-h!"

The crowd roared too soon. Orwic's buckler intervened. Glaucus, spring backward to avoid the Briton's swiping scimitar, tripped over a dead gladiator.

"*Habet!*"

But the crowd was wrong again. Glaucus was uninjured — instantly on his feet. There were five Northmen and four Britons down. Twice that number of Glaucus' men laying crimsoning the sand. The gladiators realized their case was desperate — sprang back into line again behind their leader.

Instantly Tros re-formed his wedge. He did not

dare to take his eyes off Glaucus for more than a second, but he spared one swift glance at the Vestals. The Vestalis Maxima was still talking to Pompey, who leaned forward from his seat, apparently engaged in heated argument; his face was flushed. There was something unexpected happening. The spectators seemed aware of it; they swayed; there was a new note in the tumult.

But there was also a new move in Glaucus' mind; he spread his arms and shouted. Instantly his men split in two divisions and attacked the wedge on either flank, Glaucus watching his chance to charge at Tros when the weight of the assault should have driven the Northmen back a yard or two and left him unprotected.

For a breath — ten — twenty breaths the wedge held — until suddenly the Northmen lost their heads and charged to meet the onslaught, breaking line and bellowing their "Odin! Odin!" as they locked shields against the gladiators' and opposed sheer strength and fury against skill. As swiftly as leaves whirl and scatter in the wind the tight formation broke up into single combats.

And now, again, the crowd went frantic. Glaucus, favorite of fortune, winner of a hundred fights, had met his destiny at last! Tros had at him in silence, grimly, minded to make swift work of it — ears, eyes, passion concentrated.

There was a blare of trumpets — but it might have been a thousand miles away. There was a man's voice pitched against the thunder of the crowd — but it was a voice heard in a dream. There was a yelping, snarling anger note in the crowd's increasing tumult — but that only matched Tros's own dissatisfaction with the gods, who had provided him no better opportunity than this to save the day. He had no desire to kill Glaucus. He knew he must, and anger substituted for desire.

Glaucus sprang like a leopard — fainted — turned aside Tros's lunge on his buckler — ducked in to get the advantage with his short sword at close quarters.

The quick stab missed by a hand's breadth. Tros's next stroke shore away the crest of Glaucus' helmet, the terrific impact hurling back the gladiator on his heels. There was never a doubt about the outcome from the second. Glaucus fought a losing battle with the desperate determination of a veteran — cunning, alert, experimenting with a hundred tricks, now giving ground, now feigning weariness, now swifter than a flash of lightning. Twice he drew blood. Once, with a whirlwind effort that brought tumults from the crowd, he forced Tros backward against a writhing gladiator's body and then, buckler against buckler, almost tripped him. But the effort spent itself and Tros's strength overwhelmed him. Glaucus' own blood trickled in his eyes from where the long sword had shorn the helmet-brass and bit into his scalp. He shook his head, like an embattled bull and sprang in blindly trying to smash down Tros's guard with his buckler. For a second they were breath to breath, and he spat in Tros's face, stabbing furiously, until Tros hurled him backward and the long sword licked out like a tongue of flame.

The sword was swifter than the eye, yet thought was swifter.

*"Habet!"*

The crowd's yelp was like a thunder-clap. But swifter than a year's events that flash by in a dream, was the vision of Nepos' face — the memory of Nepos' voice — the thought of Glaucus' willingness to wound and then ask mercy for his victim. Between syllable and syllable of *"Habet!"* the point lowered and went lunging into Glaucus' thigh.

"Down with you!" Tros beat him to the sand with a terrific buckler blow. He set his foot on him. Glaucus tried to squirm free.

*"Lie still!"*

Now he became conscious of the trumpet blasts, and of the man's voice pitched against the din. The crowd was screaming savagely for Glaucus' death; they lusted for the last refinement of mob-cruelty,

the fun of turning on their favorite, condemning him as he appealed for the mercy he had so often begged for others.

Tros raised his sword and glanced at Pompey's box. The triumvir was gone! The box was empty! Some of his Northmen were cheering. He could not count how many men were killed; his own head swam, but through the corner of his eye he saw the dungeon door was open. Nepos and his attendants were dragging wounded men into a group. There were thirty or forty simultaneous fights going on among the upper rows of seats, and officials were swarming up over the barriers to enforce order; others were already driving the spectators out through the exits at the rear. But the Vestals were still seated, although their attendants seemed to urging them to go. Tros threw up his sword and asked for Glaucus' life. All four Vestals waved their handkerchiefs. The next he knew, Nepos was nudging him.

"Down on you knees!" commanded Nepos, signing to his men, who set their hooks under Glaucus' armpits and began to drag him away.

Tros knelt. The Vestals waved their handkerchiefs again.

"That is enough for me," said Nepos. "Swiftly!"

The men in masks were dragging out the dead. One was killing wounded gladiators, drawing a heavy sword across their throats, but Nepos would not let him kill Tros's men. Orwic, bleeding and breathless, came to examine Tros's wounds, but Nepos was impatient. The crowd was raging.

"Come!" he commanded. He appeared to think Tros knew what had happened. "Bid your men carry their wounded. Swift before your gods reverse themselves!"

The dungeon guards hustled them out as swiftly as the wounded could be dragged and carried. The great door of the *carceres* slammed shut behind them, deadening the angry tumult of the crowd.

"That is the first time in the history of Rome!"



said Nepos. "What gods do you pray to? I myself would like to sacrifice to gods who can accomplish that!"

Tros answered sullenly:

"Eleven good men dead — and all these wounded! Rot me such a lousy lot of gods!"

Nepos brought a doctor, whose accomplishment was cauterizing wounds with red-hot iron and was bitterly offended because Tros preferred the pine-oil dressing that the druids had given him which he kept in his haversack. Tros dressed the Northmen's wounds, then Orwic's, then his own.

"There is magic in this," he said, offering the flask to Nepos. "I will give you what is left of it. Tell me now what happened."

"Julia died!" said Nepos. "Didn't you hear the announcer? There came two messengers, and one told Pompey, but another told the Vestals. Pompey would have let the games go on, not daring to offend the crowd, but the Vestals said shame on him and — so the guard near Pompey's box told me — they threatened to predict a great disaster to the Roman arms, and to ascribe the blame to Pompey, if he disobeyed them. They thought a deal of Julia. So did everybody. Rome will have to go in mourning. I will bet you fifty sesterces that Pompey will do all he can to keep the news from Julius Cæsar until he can get ready to defend himself. The link that kept them from each other's throats is broken."

"And what now?" Tros asked.

"You are free, my friend. The Vestals ordered it. But not yet. I will keep you in the dungeon until darkness makes it easier to pass unrecognized."

There was wisdom in delay, particularly as Tros did not want to be seen escaping down the Tiber. But it was hardly an hour before Helene came and sent a message by Nepos.

"Speak through the gate with her," he advised, and came and listened in the shadow where the great steps turned under the entrance arch.

“Tros!” exclaimed Helene, her lips trembling with excitement, “you would do well to make haste! All Rome knows the Vestals have released you. Zeuxis is afraid of you; he knows Conops came; he has warned one of Pompey’s men that your ship will try to pick you up in Ostia. The gallopers have gone to warn the captains of the triremes! If you try to go by chariot to Ostia they will find excuse to bar the road against you; they will certainly seize your ship! But I have permits to take stage to Gaul. None will expect you to take that route. Leave your men. Come with me!”

Tros wondered whether it was she or Zeuxis who had contrived that danger to the ship — even whether it was true at all, although he knew that either of them would be capable of doing it. Helene was as treacherous as Zeuxis. He could read determination in her eyes. He had to invent subterfuge, and suddenly.

“Here are half of the pearls I owe you,” he said, pulling out his leather pouch. “Take them. Give Zeuxis this.” He produced the ivory *tessera*. “Tell him, I denounce *hospitium*; from this hour we are enemies, to the death unless he can explain how he sent my Northmen rotten axes. You shall have the other pearls I owe you — after I reach Britain — after Cæsar manumits you. Go tell Zeuxis.”

“You will come by road to Gaul?”

“If there is no other way. I must see to my men. They are good men. The gods would rot me if I gave them no chance; also some of them are badly hurt. I have arranged to send them down the Tiber. If all goes well they may find some way of escaping to their own land. Meet me one hour after dark down by the fish-wharf near the bridge. I will be free to answer you then. Bring Zeuxis, but see that he doesn’t betray me again. Make him believe I love him and would welcome a fair explanation. Manage so that I shall find him where he can’t escape — down there beside the fish-wharf in the dark. I think the

gods would not approve if I should miss my reckoning with Zeuxis."

"You and your gods! I would give ten gods for your little finger! So would Cæsar!" She nodded, and went to do his bidding, careful not to stay too long near the dungeon gate because of loiterers — and because there was a bad stench coming through the entrance tunnel.

"You will kill Zeuxis?" Nepos asked, taking Tros's arm as he returned into the dungeon. "Better let me have him crucified. I can contrive that easily."

"Friend Nepos, will you do me this last favor, that you let me attend to Zeuxis?"

It was pitch dark when the party filed out of the dungeon with the wounded Northmen leaning between comrades and one carried on a stretcher in the midst. The streets were nearly empty. Whoever was abroad at that hour took care to avoid to large a company of stalwarts, who were very likely galdiators carrying a drunken master home. The slaves at the city gate were playing dice beside a torch and hardly looked up. Nearly all the porters near the bridge-foot were asleep. The long, shadowy fish-wharf, built of wooden piles, appeared deserted as Tros led the way down creaking wooden steps. He saw the men whom Conops had brought, all sitting glooming by a bonfire built of broken crates below a low shed, with their oars like a gridiron's shadow leaning up against the shed wall. And he saw the boats, their noses to the bank within a stone's throw of the men. For one long, hopeful minute he believed he had escaped Helene.

But she stepped out of a shadow suddenly and took his hand.

"Tros, here is Zeuxis! He supposes he is to meet a man who is willing to murder you for half your pearls!"

She pointed into shadow. Tros sprang. He dragged out Zeuxis, squealing, shook him like a rat until his breath was gone, then gave him to two Northmen to

be gagged and bound. The men by the bonfire recognized Tros then and ran to greet him; he had hard work to prevent them from making an uproar.

"Man the boats! Silence!" They threw the Greek into the first boat as it nosed the wharf. When that was done, and all his men were loaded in the three boats, he turned on Helene suddenly.

"Are you alone? Are you safe?"

"I have servants yonder. Are you coming? What will they do with Zeuxis? Drown him? Sell him into slavery?"

"He comes with me to Britain," Tros said grimly. "I am taking him to save you from his tongue. If his affairs don't prosper in his absence, perhaps Cæsar may recompense him! Farewell, Helene! You may look for manumission and the pearls when I have said my say to Cæsar's ear!"

He jumped into the foremost boat, but she seized the painter and tossed it cleverly around a bollard. He could have cut it with his sword but hesitated, wondering what treachery she might do yet if he should leave her feeling scorned. She solved that problem for him.

"Tros," she said, "they have ordered out the triremes!"

"How do you know?" he demanded. Whereat she laughed a little.

"Tros, you are lost unless you come with me to Gaul!"

"So it was you who suggested triremes, was it? You who told Pompey to capture my ship? Well, we shall see!"

He cut the painter with his sword and left her standing there. He could see her figure, like a shadow, waving, until the boats swept out of sight around a bend, and the last he heard of her was his own name rolling musically down the river!

"Tros! Tros! Turn while it is not too late! Tros!"

Danger was as nothing to the thought of an entanglement with her! Lions had not scared him half as much! Escape from the arena had not brought as

much relief as leaving her behind! All the way down-Tiber, as he urged his men and beat time for the oars, he exulted at having saved her from betrayal by the Greek, but more at having saved himself out of her clutches. But he still had to save his ship. He still had to save Caswallon and his Britons. Row! Row!

They passed by Ostia at midnight, seeing nothing but the watchmen's lanterns and low line of the receding hills on either hand, with here and there a group of shadowy masts inshore. As dawn approached they rested on their oars and let the longshore current bear them northward as they keep all eyes strained for the three great purple sails. Orwic was the first to see them, yelling and waving his arms in the boat ahead. Tros was the first to see two other sails, a mile apart and a mile to seaward of his own ship, that appeared as dawn sent shimmering light along the dancing sea.

Sigurdson was standing in to search the harbor mouth. The triremes had put out to sea in darkness and hard worked to windward of him. They were closing in now under oar and sail to force him into Ostia or crush him on their boiling bronze beaks.

"Row! Row!"

By the time Tros stepped on to his own poop there was not a quarter of a mile between the three ships. The triremes' oars were beating up the sea into a white confusion. They were coming along two legs of a triangle before a brisk breeze.

"Out oars! Drums and cymbals!"

Tros took the helm from Sigurdson and put the ship about.

"Let go halyards! Downhaul!"

The three great purple sails came down on deck. The trireme captains mistook that for a signal of surrender. They slightly changed course so as the range alongside, on either hand. Tros set the drums and cymbals beating.

"To the benches, Conops! Half-speed, but splash! Make it look like a panic until I give the word. Then



backs and legs into the work and pull!"

The *Liafail*, tin-bottomed and as free from weed as on the day Tros launched her in the Thames, began to gather headway. The trireme captains saw she meant to try to escape between them. Judging her speed, they changed helm simultaneously, leaning over in the wind and leaping forward to the shouts of the oar-overseers, their crew were panic-stricken, until Tros threw up his right hand for a double drum-beat.

"Row!" Conops echoed him.

There were seconds while the issue hung in balance — seconds during which Tros dreaded that the trireme captains might have speed, too, in reserve — but he could see the weeds under their hulls. Or that they might have manned their arrow-engines — though it was not probable that they had had time enough to get their fighting crews on board. He beat time, setting an ever faster oar-beat, doubting his own eye, mistrusting his judgment, believing he had overrated his own ship's speed and under-guessed that of the triremes. Wind and wave were against him.

But his great bronze serpent in the bow laughed gaily, shaking its tongue as it danced on the waves. Too late, both the trireme captains saw he had escaped. They changed helm, tried to back oars, let go sheets and halyards — and crashed, each beak into the other's bow, with a havoc of falling spars and breaking timber and the oars all skyward as the rowers sprawled among the benches.

"Catapult?" asked Sigurdson. "They are a big mark. We could hit them with the first shot."

Conops came on deck to watch the triremes rolling, locked together sinking.

"Arrows?" he suggested, fingering the 'paulin housing of an arrow-engine.

"Let be!" Tros answered. "Spare them for the sake of Nepos and the Vestal Virgins!"

For a while he laughed at the absurdity of coupling the Roman headsman and the Vestals in one category. Then:

"Have we wine aboard? Serve wine to all hands.

There's a long pull and a hard blow to the coast of Britain. May the gods give us gales from astern and no scurvy!"

## Chapter XXXIII

### BRITAIN: LATE SUMMER

*I perceive that, even as the seasons and the years, and night and day make war on one another, there will be conquerors and conquered, until Wisdom reigns. But I believe we enter into Wisdom one by one. A herd hates Wisdom. I perceive that conquerors can conquer fools; they are already the slaves of avarice and suchlike vices, and among the avaricious Avarice is King. A wise man's conquest is himself, to the end that the gaining gales of Wisdom may fill his sails and, blowing him clear of the shoals of ignorance, storm him toward new horizons.*

From The Log of Tros of Samothrace

A row of bonfires on a beach glared fitfully. The skeletons of ships and a mystery of moving shadows on a white chalk cliff suggested through squalls of rain a battlefield of fabulous, enormous monsters. The bonfire flames were colored by the sea-salt and by copper fastenings that men were raking out as swiftly as the timber was consumed; the figures of the men suggested demons of the underworld attending furnaces where dead men burned their baggage on the banks of Styx. A half gale blew the flames irregularly. A tremendous thunder and the grinding of surf on shingle sang of high tide and a gradually falling sea.

Under a rough shed made of ships' beams with a mass of sand and seaweed heaped to windward Cæsar sat, pale and alert, with a list of the ships on his knees. Two veterans guarded the hut, their shields held to protect them as they leaned on spears and stared into the rain. A tribune, cloaked and helmeted, sat on a broken chest near Cæsar's feet, attending to a stream

of very precisely worded orders. that were written on a tablet by a Gaulish slave as fast as Cæsar could dictate them.

"That will be all now. Work will begin at dawn," said Cæsar, taking the tablet from the slave and frowning over it in the unsteady light from a bronze ship's lantern hanging from a beam. "Curius, will you address the men at daybreak and assure them, that though Cæsar accepts disaster he is not resigned to it. Tell them that a difficulty is an opportunity to prove how invincible Cæsar is. The fleet is broken — but by the sea, not by the human enemy. It will be seen how swiftly Romans can rebuild it. And now see who is out there in the dark. I heard a voice."

"Wind, Imperator."

"I heard a voice. Whose is it?"

Decimus Curius got to his feet with an air of not relishing the weather. He was sleepy, and stiff from exposure to storms. He drew his cloak around him, shuddering as he stepped into the darkness. Presently his voice called from where a campfire shone on one plate of his armor:

"There is a man who says his name is Tros of Samothrace. He is alone."

Cæsar's eyes changed, but the slave, who watched narrowly, detected no confession of surprise; only the lean right forefinger went to straighten his thin hair, after which he adjusted the folds of his tunic and cloak.

"You may bring him in," he said.

Tros loomed into the lantern light; the tribune at his side, though helmeted, looked as big.

"It is a bitter wind that blows you into my camp as a rule!" said Cæsar, "but in this instance the omen arrives after the event! My fleet already has been wrecked. What other misfortune can Tros of Samothrace invent for me?"

"I am the messenger of destiny," Tros answered and Cæsar stared at him, as it might be, curiously.

"Is your ship also broken on the beach?"

Tros answered with a gruff laugh.

"My ship rides the storm. It will wreak no havoc with that remnant of your fleet that frets its cables off a lee shore. I am an envoy, subject to the usages of truce."

"Provide him with a seat," said Cæsar. The slave pulled up the broken chest under the lantern light.

"You interest me, Tros. You are a very circum-spective man for one so deaf to his own interests. How often have I offered you my friendship?"

"As frequently as I gave opportunity!" Tros answered. "I am not your friend. I said, I am the messenger of destiny. I wish to speak with you alone."

The tribune, close behind Tros, pointing at his long sword, shook his head emphatically. Cæsar smiled, the deep, long lines around his mouth absorbing shadow, making his aristocratic face look something like a skull. He nodded.

"You may leave us, Curius."

The tribune shrugged his shoulders.

"Cæsar, fortune has not favored us of late," he protested. "You heard him with his own mouth say—"

"Curius, when I let fear control me, I will not begin with enemies who candidly profess their enmity! You may leave us, too," he added glancing at the slave.

Still standing — peering once or twice into the darkness to make sure the tribune and the slave were out of earshot — Tros looked straight at Cæsar and repeated the one secret word that the Vestalis Maxima had whispered to him. Cæsar looked almost startled, but he made no comment beyond signing to Tros to sit down on the chest.

"Have you conquered the Britons?" Tros asked.

"Very far from it," said Cæsar. "Their chief, Caswallon, is an excellent general with a sort of genius that needs time and persistence to defeat. Their chariots are ably handled. So is their cavalry, and I am very short of cavalry, which makes it

difficult to bring the Britons to a pitched engagement. But we will do better when the storms cease and the leaves are off the trees. You may say I have defeated them in one sense. Their army is scattered. But they are able to raid my long line of communication and to harass my foraging parties. I have seen fit to withdraw my army to the coast and to await reinforcements from Gaul. Meanwhile, there is this misfortune to my fleet. So — now that I have satisfied your curiosity, assuage mine. What do you think to gain by knowing all this?"

"I am here," siad Tros, "to turn you out of Britain!"

Cæsar smiled.

"I admire your confidence, but I think you misjudge my character. When I invade, I conquer. If you have nothing else to suggest — well, I suppose what is left of my fleet is at the mercy of your ships, since you say so, but — I can imagine worse predicaments. Surely yours is equally unpleasant!"

"I am an ambassador," said Tros.

"So I understood. You made use of a word that tempted me to speak you very frankly. Why not discharge your embassy instead of talking nonsense?"

Tros sat. With an elbow on his knee, he leaned forward until his face was not a yard from Cæsar's. He spoke in a low voice, slowly and distinctly:

"These are the words of the *Virgo Vestalis Maxima*: 'Bid Cæsar turn his eyes toward Rome! Bid him look to Gaul, that when the time comes he may leave Gaul tranquil at his rear!' "

"You bring me dangerous advice!" said Cæsar. But his eyes had changed again; he seemed to be considering, behind a mask of rather cynical amusement, calculated to make Tros feel he had blundered into too deep counsels.

"Julia is dead," Tros added, turning his head away, as if the statement were an afterthought. He had been eight-and-twenty days at sea. He thought it probable Cæsar had that news already. But the



corner of his eye detected absolute surprise. Cæsar leaned and gripped him by the shoulder.

"Are you lying?"

"That is for you to judge." Tros answered. "Are you a leader of men and need to ask that?"

"How did they keep the news from me? I have had despatches —"

Tros laughed. "If I were Pompey I would take good care to keep it from you until my army was as powerful as yours! But I am glad I am not Pompey. I foresee the end of that proud —"

"Very noble Roman!" Cæsar interrupted, finishing the sentence.

Tros sat motionless. The Roman imperator stared into the night beyond him, seeming to read destiny among the shadows and to hear it in the dirging of the sea. The very pebbles on the beach cried, "*Cæ—sar!*" The surf's thunder was ovation.

"It is not yet time," he said at last. "I will conquer Britain."

"Nay, Cæsar! The very gods are warning you! Twice running they have wrecked your ships!"

"Unless memory deceives me, it was you the first time," Caesar answered, showing not the least trace of resentment. "Generalship, Tros, consists in following an advantage instantly — which is why I doubt you now. You were blind then to your opportunity. Shall I believe you have turned suddenly into a — what is it you called yourself? — a messenger of destiny!"

"Cæsar!" Tros stood up and raised his right fist, holding his left palm ready for the oncoming blow of emphasis. His amber eyes shone like a lion's in the lantern light. "Thrice I might have slain you! If I cared to deal treacherously, all your legions could not save you now! But I am here to save the Britons, not to do cowardice. Any scullion can stab. And I despise not you, though I despise your aim. You are resolved to conquer Britain for your own pride's sake and for the luster it may add to your famous

name. But choose between Rome or Britain. What shall hinder Pompey from arousing Gaul against you and then taking the dictatorship? Is it plunder you crave? I have deposited a thousand pearls with the Vestalis Maxima for you, to make that breastplate for the Venus Genetrix — a thousand pearls; each better than the best that Pompey took from Mithridates and was too ungenerous to give to the Roman people!”

He smashed his fist into his palm at last and Cæsar blinked at him, smiling, moving a little to see past him and to signal to the tribune not to run in and protect him.

“We are not electing a people’s tribune, Tros! Sit down and calm yourself.”

But Tros stood, knotting his fingers together behind his back to help him to subdue the violence of his emotion.

“Pride is it?” he asked. “You shall boast, if you will, you have conquered the Britons! You shall show those pearls in Rome in proof of it! The Vestal has my leave to give them to you when you turn away from Britain. It is the Britons and their homesteads I will save. If you wish to say you conquered them, you have my leave — and I will add Caswallon’s if he will listen to me!”

“Where is he?” Cæsar asked, very abruptly. “I defeated him at the Thames, where he defended a ford with more skill than one might expect from a barbarian. Since then his army is divided into independent groups that harry my communications and I can not learn where he is.”

“I doubt not he expects me. I have sent a man ashore who will find him and bid him meet me at a certain place,” said Tros. “If I should go to him and say Cæsar accepts that tribute of a thousand pearls in the name of the Roman people, and is willing to make peace and to withdraw his army, I am sure I can persuade Caswallon to permit the legions to embark unhindered. And for the rest — if you crave a few chariots to adorn your triumph, and a few promises not covered by security — perhaps even a brave man’s oath of honor

that he will not encourage rebellion in Gaul I can arrange that. Otherwise —”

He paused, and for at least a minute each man looked into the other's eyes. Then:

“Otherwise?” asked Cæsar.

“I believe,” said Tros, “that you will rue the day you entered Britain! It is easy to befoul your honor by one crook of your finger, that would doubtless bring a javelin into my back out of the darkness —”

“No,” said Cæsar, “I have taken you entirely at your word. You may go as you came.”

“Go you, also, as you came!” Tros answered. “That man I set ashore has told the Britons how the matter stands in Gaul and Rome. To-morrow's dawn will see that news go spreading through the forests — and away northward to the Iceni — and westward to a dozen other tribes. It will be a long war then, that your shipless legions will be forced to wage — if they will conquer Britain for you — while Gaul rises against Rome — and Rome gives Pompey the dictatorship!”

“I begin to suspect,” said Cæsar, “that I underestimated your ability. How soon can you meet Caswalon?”

“I will take my ship around the coast and up the river, to the place where she was built, and see him there,” Tros answered.

“Very well. Will you go to him, at last, as Cæsar's friend?”

“Not I! I am neither friend nor enemy. I have brought you a Greek named Zeuxis.”

Cæsar thought a minute. Then suddenly: “Oh, that rogue — the contractor? You may have him. He might make a good servant if properly whipped.”

“And you owe nine pearls to a girl named Helene.”

“You may have her also.”

“Keep her. But manumit her.”

“She has served you? Very well,” said Cæsar. He made a note on his tablet. “Tros, there may come a day when I shall badly need an admiral.”

“Aye, Pompey has the allegiance of the Roman

fleet. But you shall struggle with him lacking my aid. What shape is the earth? Square? Round?"

"I would like to know," said Cæsar.

"I, too. But I *will* know! I will sail around the world! My father, whom you tortured, prophesied that one day I should serve you. I have done it, though it was none of my wish. But he said, when I have served you I shall have my heart's desire. If I owned Rome and all her legions, Cæsar, I would leave them to whoever lusted for such trash, and sail away. I shall have sailed around the world before you die in Rome of friendlessness and a broken heart!"

"Each to his own view. But I think you will die nevertheless, and no less turbulently. I would rather conquer what I see. That seems enough. Come back, however, if you should have that good fortune, and tell me all about your voyage."

"Cæsar," said Tros. "I hope for both our sakes not to meet you again until after death. Eternity —"

"Oh, do you believe in that?" said Cæsar.

## *BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS ABOUT TALBOT MUNDY*

Talbot Mundy was born in London, England April 23rd, 1879, and educated at Rugby. After spending a year in Germany studying agriculture, he had a Government job at Baroda in India and subsequently wandered all over India on horseback, even penetrating Tibet. In those days he had no idea of writing, but was fascinated by the Indian occult teachings, neglecting no opportunity to learn all he could about them. His novels reveal the Indian influence.

After serving through the Boer War in Africa, he went broke and sailed before the mast, reaching Australia where he walked up the east side of the continent from Sydney to Brisbane. It was this that gave him his zest for walking.

Returning to Africa, he walked the full length of the continent from south to north, and later on, the width of it from east to west and back again. For a considerable time he was in Government service in the country now known as Kenya, where he mastered several of the native languages. He did a great deal of big game hunting — lions and elephants — but his chief interest was native magic, which he studied intensively.

Incapacitated by blackwater fever, he was carried aboard a ship and sent to London to recuperate. Shortly thereafter, he crossed the Atlantic to the United States, where he became a citizen in 1917.

In 1920, Mundy traveled all over the Near East, making Jerusalem his headquarters. From there he visited Egypt. In later years he traveled widely in Mexico, visiting Yucatan twice to study Mayan history — traveled extensively in Europe and lived a year in Palma, Mallorcà.



He traveled in every State of the Union, and at different times resided in New York, Maine, California, Connecticut and finally in Florida where he died on August 5th, 1940.

In addition to short stories in popular magazines, he wrote more than forty novels which were published in the United States and England, many of which were translated into French, German, Scandinavian, Hindustani and Japanese. Among them:

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THE EYE OF ZEITON  
GUNS OF THE GODS  
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**"DRAW NEAR, AND I WILL WHISPER  
THE WORD"**

the Vestal commanded

**TROS OF SAMOTHRACE.**

"that will be sufficient proof to Caesar that you come from me. He will believe your lips. But if you use it falsely, then I know of no death and no curse that were not bliss as compared to what your destiny will hold! There are surely depths of misery where worms that crawl in corruption appear godlike in comparison to him who dies so deep. For you will know the praetor's dungeon if you dare to

**BETRAY THIS CAESAR!**

